

**ON THE STREETS AND IN THE SUBURBS: PHOTOGRAPHERS OF THE
AMERICAN SOCIAL LANDSCAPE, 1963-1976**

By

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Abstract

Three American photographers came to prominence during the years bracketed by the assassination of President John F. Kennedy in 1963 and the American Bicentennial in 1976. Lee Friedlander (born 1934), Garry Winogrand (1928-1984), and Robert Adams (born 1937) each used an emotionally detached, “documentary-style” approach to picture the rapidly changing social landscape of this period. This dissertation brings a fresh perspective to select bodies of work by these photographers. Though each chapter is intended as a singular, in-depth discussion of specific projects, the essays are united by a methodological approach grounded in social art history, rather than the rhetoric of “photographic” formalism as espoused by John Szarkowski, who promoted the work of these three photographers through exhibitions and publications during his tenure as Director of Photography at the Museum of Modern Art, New York from 1962-1991. The interpretive framework for this dissertation nonetheless retains an appreciation for the unique formal and aesthetic aspects of the photographs as they were informed by the particular historical moment in which they were produced and received.

The first chapter focuses on Garry Winogrand’s *Public Relations*, situating the photographs within the context of a burgeoning critical discourse about the impact of television and the mass media on social behavior as articulated by such writers as Daniel J. Boorstin and Marshall McLuhan. The second chapter reconsiders another body of work by Winogrand, *Women are Beautiful*, and focuses on Winogrand’s photographs of female subjects on the streets and in the public spaces of New York City within the context of the women’s liberation movement and the sexual revolution. Robert Adams’s photographs of suburban sprawl and industrial development along the Colorado Front Range and the Denver metropolitan area, which comprised three related series—*The New West*, *denver* and *What We Bought*—are the focus of

the third chapter. This essay proposes a new interpretation of Adams's photographs as rooted in a long tradition of American Transcendentalist thought and contemporaneous environmentally conscious writing. The fourth and final chapter focuses on Lee Friedlander's *The American Monument*, and considers these photographs as they resonate with the themes of history, memory, and patriotism in the wake of the Vietnam War and Watergate.

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vividly recall these experiences. Perhaps that is why these images have so long been steeped in my consciousness.

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Introduction

This dissertation aims to bring a fresh interpretation to select bodies of work by three American photographers who came to prominence between 1963 and 1976: Lee Friedlander (born 1934), Garry Winogrand (1928-1984), and Robert Adams (born 1937). Each chapter is intended as a singular, in-depth discussion of specific projects by these photographers. The first chapter focuses on Garry Winogrand's *Public Relations*, situating the photographs within the same historical moment that inspired writers such as Daniel J. Boorstin and Marshall McLuhan to address the impact of television and the mass media on the social landscape of this period. The second chapter reconsiders another body of work by Winogrand, *Women are Beautiful*, and focuses on Winogrand's photographs of female subjects on the streets and in the public spaces of New York City within the context of the women's liberation movement and the sexual revolution. Robert Adams's photographs of suburban sprawl and industrial development along the Colorado Front Range and the Denver metropolitan area, which comprised three related series—*The New West*, *denver* and *What We Bought*—are the focus of the third chapter. This essay proposes a new interpretation of Adams's photographs as rooted in a long tradition of American Transcendentalist thought and contemporaneous environmentally conscious writing. The fourth and final chapter focuses on Lee Friedlander's *The American Monument*, and considers these photographs as they resonate with the themes of history, memory, and patriotism in the wake of the Vietnam War and Watergate. Significantly, all of these projects were published as books, a format that allowed the photographers to edit and sequence their images, while providing an accessible means to disseminate the work beyond the museum walls to an

audience interested in serious art photography.¹ The book format also encouraged a consideration of the photographs as a collective artistic statement, as opposed to concentrating on a single, “masterfully” crafted print as a means of creative expression.

Uniting these chapters is a methodological approach grounded in social art history, one that considers the broader socio-cultural context of the period as it informed the formal “photographic” qualities of these photographers’ images. This interpretive framework has not been rigorously applied to the work of Friedlander, Winogrand, and Adams, despite the fact that these photographers made pictures of the “social landscape” (a term that requires historicization, to be discussed later in this introduction). The primary reason for this lack of scholarship relates to the persistence of a rhetorical framework of “photographic” formalism, established and promoted by John Szarkowski (1925-2007) during his tenure as director of the Department of Photography at The Museum of Modern Art, New York between 1962 and 1991. Szarkowski’s influence during the 1960s and 1970s was considerable. Through his exhibitions and publications, as well as the sheer force of his personality, Szarkowski helped to launch and establish the careers of these three photographers. To date, his formative interpretation of their work has predominated scholarship. Though museum exhibitions and publications since 2000

¹ This audience grew significantly during the late 1960s and early 1970s for a variety of reasons. Fine art museums began to regularly exhibit photography and publish exhibition catalogues. Academic institutions expanded their programs to include photography as a distinct course within studio art practice, as opposed to studying it as an introductory course for commercial and journalistic applications. Concurrently, photographic history emerged as a new area within art history departments. Programs at the University of New Mexico (1971), the University of Chicago (1976), and Princeton University (1972) were founded by figures such as Beaumont Newhall, Joel Snyder, and Peter Bunnell, respectively. The National Endowment of the Arts, established in 1965, began a formal program in photography in 1971, which helped support a number of photographers with individual grants that were awarded regularly throughout the decade. In addition, this period saw the birth of the modern art market for photographs, and thus a commensurate rise in serious collectors of photography, with the establishment in 1971 of the Lunn Gallery, in Washington, D.C., and Light Gallery, in New York City. For an extensive description of the field’s expansion during this period, see Keith F. Davis, *An American Century of Photography: From Dry Plate to Digital* (Kansas City, MO and New York: Hallmark Cards and Harry N. Abrams, 1999), 388-397. For a history of collectors of photography, see John Pultz, “Collectors of Photography,” in *A Personal View: Photography in the Collection of Paul F. Walther* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1985), 11-22. For a historiography of photographic history, see Douglas R. Nickel, “History of Photography: The State of Research,” *Art Bulletin* 83:3 (September 2001), 548-558.

have brought renewed attention to the work of Friedlander, Winogrand, and Adams, the focus of these recent projects has been to bring unpublished or previously unknown photographs to light, or to present retrospective oeuvres organized primarily by chronology and biography, with little attention paid to social context. This dissertation thus aims to bring a new consideration of the ways in which the radical social and political changes that occurred during the years bracketed by the assassination of President John F. Kennedy in 1963 and the American Bicentennial in 1976 may have informed these three photographers' aesthetic choices, their selection of subject matter, and the initial reception of their work. Significantly, my interpretation retains an appreciation for the unique formal and aesthetic aspects of the photographs themselves.

Though Friedlander, Winogrand, and Adams each focused on different aspects of the social landscape, their work was united in its adherence to the visual rhetoric of “documentary-style” photography. Both “social landscape” and “documentary style,” as descriptive terms, require explication and historicization. In its broadest sense, the social landscape refers to both a physical place—for example, the suburban sprawl of the American West or the streets of Manhattan—and the social constituency of these geographic locations. The term also refers to those pervasive aspects of culture—television, the media, and Americans' increased reliance on automobility—that influenced both the built environment and the way people responded to and interacted with it. The social landscape is thus opposed to the wholly natural landscape, and encompasses a broad range of vernacular subjects. These landscapes may include elements of the mundane built environment—strip malls, mobile homes, suburban tract houses, street signage, gas stations, parking lots, motels—as well as the reflective architectural surfaces, billboard advertisements, and store windows that characterize urban environments, and are often seen in street photography.

The idea of a social landscape was described by the writer Lincoln Kirstein in his essay for the influential book *American Photographs* by Walker Evans (1903-1975), which was first published in 1938.² Kirstein spoke of photographing landscapes as social constructs. He suggested that one of the medium's most important uses was to picture this subject, a task to which photography, unlike painting or poetry, was uniquely well suited. Kirstein wrote:

The real photographer's other services, the services which take the greatest advantage of his particular medium and involve its most powerful effect, are social. The facts of our homes and times, shown surgically, without the intrusion of the poet's or painter's comment or necessary distortion, are the unique contemporary field of the photographer...it is for him to fix and to show the whole aspect of our society, the sober portrait of its stratifications, their backgrounds and embattled contrasts.³

As a descriptive term, "social landscape" began to appear in the discussion of landscape photography during the 1960s. In 1963, Lee Friedlander used the term to describe his subject matter in a brief statement that accompanied a small portfolio of his images that was published in the journal *Contemporary Photographer*. The phrase appeared again in two exhibition catalogues during this decade: Nathan Lyons's *Contemporary Photographers: Toward a Social Landscape*, and Thomas Garver's *Twelve Photographers of the American Social Landscape*.⁴ A variant of

² *American Photographs* is widely considered by many art photographers, historians, and critics to be Evans's most significant publication. As Tod Papageorge discusses in his essay on *American Photographs* and its influence on Robert Frank's book *The Americans* (1959), Evans had an "overwhelming early triumph" with *American Photographs* when the book was first published in 1938 by the Museum of Modern Art. The publication went out of print for several decades, but was reprinted in a second edition in 1962, a third edition in 1975, and in a fiftieth anniversary edition in 1988. John Szarkowski's 1971 retrospective of Evans's work, which emphasized images from the mid-1930s, had an accompanying catalogue that did not reproduce any of the photographs in *American Photographs* (though the exhibition, which included 200 prints, did include examples from this body of work). See Tod Papageorge, "Walker Evans and Robert Frank: An Essay on Influence," in *Core Curriculum: Writings on Photography by Tod Papageorge* (New York: Aperture, 2011), 74.

³ Lincoln Kirstein, essay in Walker Evans, *American Photographs* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1988), 192.

⁴ *Contemporary Photographers: Toward a Social Landscape* was organized for the George Eastman House in Rochester, New York in 1966 and *Twelve Photographers of the American Social Landscape* was brought together for the Rose Art Museum at Brandeis University in Waltham, Massachusetts in 1968.

this conception was the “man-altered” landscape, a descriptor used primarily to distinguish this new landscape genre from more conservative definitions that emphasized natural scenery, or from the precedent of dramatic, unpeopled natural views as established by photographers of a previous generation such as Ansel Adams (1902-1984). The exhibition *New Topographics: Photographs of a Man-Altered Landscape* was the most significant example. Organized by William Jenkins and Joe Deal for the George Eastman House in 1975, the exhibition included the work of Robert Adams, along with nine other photographers.⁵ In retrospect, *New Topographics* is considered to be one of the most influential exhibitions of the 1970s, marking a watershed moment in the history of landscape representation, expanding possibilities for the genre in photography.

Beyond the purview of art photography, the social or man-altered landscape also became a subject of serious critical inquiry in other academic disciplines, such as architectural and landscape design and cultural studies. The writings of John Brinckerhoff Jackson for the periodical *Landscape* between 1951 and 1968, for example, focused attention on the landscape as an organization of man-made spaces. Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown gave serious critical attention to the vernacular architectural forms of the Las Vegas strip in their influential study *Learning from Las Vegas*, published as a portfolio in 1972 and a second expanded edition in 1977. Additionally, contemporary artists such as Ed Ruscha (born 1937) were regularly using photography as a conceptual tool to represent the mundane built environment in an ironic, deadpan, and typological fashion. *Twentysix Gasoline Stations* (1962), *Every Building on the Sunset Strip* (1966), *Thirtyfour Parking Lots* (1967), and *Real Estate Opportunities* (1970), were among several artist photobooks produced by Ruscha during this period. In addition to their

⁵ In addition to Adams, these photographers included Lewis Baltz, Bernd and Hilla Becher, Joe Deal, Frank Gohlke, Nicholas Nixon, John Schott, Stephen Shore, and Henry Wessel, Jr.

shared interest in representing the social landscape, Friedlander, Winogrand, and Adams adhered to the visual rhetoric of “documentary-style” photography. Broadly speaking, the documentary-style approach to making photographs is characterized by a lack of overt photographic manipulation of the subject and a refusal to align photography with a specific social, political, or moral message. As a means to reinforce this rhetoric of neutrality, titles to photographs are often simple, factual descriptions that include subject, place, and date. Walker Evans is again an important figure with respect to this stylistic precedent. Evans’s work from the 1930s gained renewed interest during the 1960s and early 1970s due in large part to the publication of a second edition of *American Photographs* in 1962, and a major retrospective, organized by Szarkowski, at MoMA in 1971. When the second edition of *American Photographs* was released, Monroe Wheeler, the longtime director of exhibitions and publications at MoMA, remarked on the value of Evans’s book for a new generation, noting: “Many young people, who have found the first edition in libraries, regard it not only as an extraordinary example of photographic art but as an indispensable visual chronicle, and they have wanted to procure it. We dedicate this new generation to them.”⁶ Evans distinguished “documentary-style” photography, specifically, from the more utilitarian “documentary” photography. He noted that while a “literal document” has a use, and thus cannot be art, a photograph that has the appearance of being a document, but is useless, could be considered art.⁷ Evans’s ideas about photography were thus in line with the modernist notion of art that separated art from utility.

⁶ Monroe Wheeler, foreword to the 1962 edition, in Walker Evans, *American Photographs*, 199.

⁷ The complete quote derives from an interview with Leslie Katz, in which Katz asks Evans: “Then photographs can be documentary as well as works of art?” to which Evans replies: “Documentary? That’s a very sophisticated and misleading word. And not really clear. You have to have a sophisticated ear to receive that word. The term should be documentary style. An example of a literal document would be a police photograph of a murder scene. You see, a document has use, whereas art is really useless. Therefore art is never a document, though it certainly can adopt that style.” Leslie Katz, “An Interview with Walker Evans,” in Vicki Goldberg, ed. *Photography in Print* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1981), 364-365.

To understand the appeal that Evans's conception had for photographers like Friedlander, Winogrand, and Adams, it is useful to historicize the shift in photographic practice that had occurred between the 1950s and the early 1960s. Two main categories of photography held sway during this period: popular photojournalism, as seen in the pages of *Life* magazine and celebrated in prestigious publications such as *U.S. Camera Annual*, and a style of self-expressive art photography championed by a group of photographers and photo historians, including Ansel Adams, Dorothea Lange, Beaumont and Nancy Newhall, and Minor White. The former category appealed to Edward Steichen, who preceded Szarkowski as director of the department of photography at MoMA from 1947 through 1962, and who demonstrated an affinity for this kind of popular photography in such exhibitions as *The Family of Man* (1955). The latter approach to picture making arose, in part, as a reaction against Steichen's brand of curation, and inspired the founding of *Aperture* magazine in 1952.⁸ Originally conceived as a forum for serious art photography, *Aperture* was, soon after its founding, dominated by the views of Minor White (1908-1976), who served as the magazine's editor from 1952 through 1976. White's outspoken opinion caused philosophical rifts between him and some of the other founding members (including Ansel Adams), but White (and *Aperture*) nonetheless became an influential vehicle for photographers. Ultimately, White promoted the idea that photograph should be "read" as a complex nexus of metaphors, or as a symbolic reflection of the consciousness of the photographer.⁹

⁸ In addition to Ansel Adams, Dorothea Lange, the Newhalls, and Minor White, the founders of *Aperture* magazine included photographers Milton Ferris, Ernest Louie, Barbara Morgan, and Dody Warren.

⁹ White culled his idiosyncratic philosophy from a combination of Gestalt psychology, terminology established by Swiss art historian Heinrich Wölfflin, and Zen Buddhism (among other sources). For a more extensive account of White's influence, see Jonathan Green, *A Critical History of American Photography 1945 to the Present* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1984), 69-74.

The idea that a photograph should be interpreted symbolically as a form of metaphoric self-expression, or that it should overtly serve the agendas of popular photojournalism, stood in sharp contrast to the rhetoric of emotional detachment that documentary-style photography sought to convey. For Friedlander, Winogrand, and Adams, the most engaging and effective photographs needed to lack subjective, expressive meaning. This notion resonated deeply with their photographic concerns. Both Friedlander and Winogrand began their careers in photography working in photojournalism and for freelance picture agencies during the late 1950s and into the early 1960s. This kind of photography fed editorial and commercial imperatives, wherein the visual content of photographs was subordinated to the narratives of news, entertainment, and human interest stories (which fell somewhere between these two categories). Images were subject to captions and editorial juxtapositions that were beyond the photographers' control, and rarely conveyed the degree of artistic ambiguity that both Winogrand and Friedlander sought in their personal work. Robert Adams did not come from a freelancing background, but rather from an academic career as a professor of English literature. His decision to take up photography and work in a more documentary-style mode was less a reaction against the strictures of popular photojournalism, but rather a personal, even moral, decision to avoid picturing the landscape of the American West in the idealized, overly expressive manner that characterized the photographs of his predecessors—Ansel Adams in particular—despite his genuine appreciation for that earlier work.

Friedlander, Winogrand, and Adams all sought to make photographs that represented a subject encountered in the real world, as opposed to one that was fabricated in order to be photographed, or one whose meaning might be altered when placed in the context of captions or accompanying text. Abstraction, symbolism, and self-expression through the use of metaphor

were of little interest to these photographers as viable working methods. Significantly, however, the rhetoric associated with documentary-style photography, which relied on the photograph's indexical ties to its subject matter, divorced the photograph from the social contexts in which the image was made. By refusing to foreground the socio-political contexts that shaped their photographs, which might render them overly biased and subjective, Friedlander, Winogrand, and Adams were able to more readily distinguish their photographs as serious art.

None of these three photographers came to this appreciation of documentary-style aesthetics on their own. Articulating a theory for and vehemently defending these ideas about photography was John Szarkowski. In addition to actively promoting Walker Evans's work during the late 1960s and 1970s, Szarkowski developed a highly original and significant theory of photography that established specific formal parameters for the medium. Szarkowski articulated his philosophy most notably in two exhibition and publication projects, *The Photographer's Eye* (1966) and *Looking at Photographs* (1972). *The Photographer's Eye* was particularly influential. In this book, Szarkowski identified five key characteristics of the medium: the thing itself, the detail, the frame, time, and vantage point. He championed the descriptive capacities of the photograph over its synthetic qualities, thus emphasizing the importance of the medium's indexical ties to the world. In his selection of works, he included photographs by established figures as well as lesser known photographers, promoting, in his words: "Not only great pictures by great photographers, but *photography*—the great undifferentiated, homogenous whole of it."¹⁰ By exhibiting and publishing works by individual photographers who put into practice his assertions about the medium, Szarkowski shaped the

¹⁰ John Szarkowski, introduction to *The Photographer's Eye* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2007), unpaginated. *The Photographer's Eye* grew out of a 1964 exhibition, and after its first edition was published in 1966, it was printed in two more editions, in 1980 and 2007.

careers of Friedlander, Winogrand and Adams. His influence cannot be underestimated in this regard. Szarkowski gave all three men their first major museum exhibitions. He included Winogrand's photographs in a group exhibition in 1963 (*Five Unrelated Photographers*), and exhibited both Winogrand's and Friedlander's photographs, along with those of Diane Arbus, in the important 1967 show *New Documents*. Winogrand's photographs from *The Animals* were shown in 1969 and *Public Relations* in 1977 (though Winogrand produced the majority of these images between 1969 and 1976). Friedlander's photographs comprised a solo exhibition in 1974 and Robert Adams's photographs from *The New West* were featured in a two-man show with Emmet Gowin in 1971-72. Szarkowski also provided significant moral support through close personal friendships, particularly with Winogrand and Friedlander, for whom he served as a reference for their successful Guggenheim Fellowship applications.¹¹ Though not as personally close with Szarkowski, Adams has also commented on the enormous impact the curator had in encouraging his career as an artist.¹² Without Szarkowski's reputation and influence, which was at the time preeminent in the field of art photography, none of these three photographers would likely have been fully able to pursue artistic careers.

In summary, two key factors shaped the early critical reception of these photographers' works: the influence of Evans's documentary style, separating as it did art photography from documentation, and Szarkowski's formalist rhetoric, which severed art photography from social

¹¹ Szarkowski served as a reference for Winogrand on all three of his successful fellowship applications, in 1964 ("to make photographic studies of American life"), in 1969 ("to study the effect of the media on events") and in 1978, to photograph in California. Friedlander also received three fellowships in 1960, 1962, and 1977, though it was Walker Evans, in his capacity as a confidential advisor to the Guggenheim Foundation, who is credited as having helped Friedlander secure that support for the first two awards, with Szarkowski serving as a reference for the third. See chronology in John Szarkowski, *Winogrand: Figments from the Real World* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1988), 249-252, and Peter Galassi's essay, "You Have to Change to Stay the Same," in *Friedlander* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2005), 18.

¹² Adams has said that if it were not for Szarkowski's encouragement after the young photographer showed the curator his prints in the early 1970s, Adams would not have left his academic career as a professor of English literature to become an artist. Conversation between April M. Watson and Robert Adams, November 20, 2008.

context. It is important to note, however, that even during the height of Szarkowski's power, the curator's biases did not go completely unchallenged by contemporaneous critics and artists. This history is also important to summarize, in brief, so as to fully understand how the challenges to Szarkowski's formalism impacted critical dialogue about art photography, generally, and the work of Friedlander, Winogrand, and Adams, specifically, during the mid-1970s through the early 1990s.

Two early critics of Szarkowski's rhetoric were Gene Thornton and A. D. Coleman, who alternated writing a weekly column for the *New York Times* between 1970 and 1974.¹³ Thornton was a humanist who often had difficulties accepting Szarkowski's ideologies and the curator's preferences for subjects that Thornton considered to be insignificant and banal. In one review, for example, Thornton described the work included in Robert Adams's first significant two-person exhibition at MoMA in 1971 as "lifeless," noting that the photographers' approach was "so neutral and unempathetic that at times I felt I was looking at pictures made without any human direction by mere machines programmed to go off at set intervals and photograph whatever happened to be in front of them."¹⁴ Coleman, in contrast, was not a humanist, and his line of criticism conveyed concerns that postmodernists would later take up more vehemently in their challenges to Szarkowski's subjective proclivities for documentary-style photography divorced from social realities. Coleman took issue with the perceived "dangers" of Szarkowski's limited vision, as director of one of the nation's most influential curatorial photography

¹³ Thornton also wrote a photography column periodically for *Artnews*, having come to photography criticism after serving as an art critic for *Time*. Coleman also wrote a regular column for *The Village Voice* from 1968 to 1973. For an excellent synopsis of both critics' careers and perspectives, see Joel Eisinger, *Trace and Transformation: American Criticism of Photography in the Modernist Period* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995), 237-244 and 248-258.

¹⁴ Gene Thornton, "Lifeless—With or Without People," *New York Times*, January 9, 1972.

departments.¹⁵ He criticized Szarkowski's narrow view, which by the curator's own admission was "autocratic, elitist and appropriately limited by the curator's own ideas and taste patterns, the narrower the better."¹⁶ Coleman also noted that Szarkowski's theory privileged formal invention over any acknowledgment of political or social content. Though Coleman saw the value of such modernist notions as artistic intentionality and originality of vision, he decried MoMA's failure to address its own politics, and regularly condemned Szarkowski's curatorial selections. Coleman found Winogrand's work, and the photographer himself, particularly problematic, writing that Winogrand's ostensible detachment from his subjects was "feigned," and that, in truth, his "images are judgmental," and his "evidence-gathering methodology is biased in the extreme."¹⁷ Szarkowskian rhetoric applied to these photographs thus rang false for Coleman, whose criticism of Winogrand's work was directly linked to his critique of the institution that supported the photographer.

As photographic practice during the late 1960s and early 1970s diversified among both trained photographers and conceptual artists who used photography as part of their creative practice, Szarkowski was increasingly called to task for the limitations of his rhetoric. Coleman began this line of inquiry, but the most enduring challenges arose from postmodern artists and writers who came to prominence in the latter part of the 1970s. Their Marxist-inflected,

¹⁵ In an article discussing the departure of MoMA's photography curator Peter Bunnell to take a position at Princeton University, Coleman noted that Bunnell's resignation from the museum "leaves a large hole in the department's esthetic, and it appears that hole will not be filled... This is a dangerous situation for the medium, since Szarkowski's overriding interest has always been the documentary tradition (centering on the Farm Security Administration crew, extending backwards in time to various precursors to Walker Evans and forward to exponents of the tradition). His sympathies for more experimental approaches in the medium—be it mixed-media or technically straight but conceptually freakish imagery—have proved mostly scant." A. D. Coleman, "Who Will Be the Replacements?," *New York Times*, May 7, 1972.

¹⁶ A. D. Coleman, "Where's the Money?," in *Light Readings* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 219.

¹⁷ A. D. Coleman, "Slim Pickings in Hog Heaven: Garry Winogrand's Stock Photographs," reprinted in A.D. Coleman, *Tarnished Silver: After the Photo Boom Essays and Lectures 1979-1989* (New York: Midmarch Arts Press, 1996), 97.

poststructuralist ideologies held considerable sway throughout the 1980s and early 1990s. Critics and scholars such as Abigail Solomon-Godeau, Deborah Bright, Rosalind Krauss, and Christopher Phillips, many of whom wrote regularly about photography for the academic periodical *October*, excoriated Szarkowski (and by extension, MoMA) for what they believed was a deeply flawed theoretical construct, condoned by an institution that showed little, if any, regard for the social and political issues of this period. In one *October* essay, “The Judgment Seat of Photography” (1982), Phillips articulates these concerns. Focusing exclusively on MoMA’s perceived authority in establishing certain kinds of photographs as museum-worthy art objects, Phillips delineates the institution’s role in shaping a very specific view of the medium’s history over time.¹⁸ Ultimately, Phillips argued that Szarkowski’s rhetoric neglected history’s complex and multidimensional reality. As Phillips wrote: “As should be apparent, this version of history is, in truth, a flight from history, from history’s reversals, repudiations, and multiple determinations.”¹⁹

Phillips and his fellow *October* critics often targeted the work of those photographers, like Friedlander, Winogrand, and Adams, that Szarkowski championed. In an essay discussing Robert Adams’s landscapes of the new American West, for example, Deborah Bright criticized Adams for his failure to overtly state his political beliefs when displaying his photographs with minimal accompanying text—an act she identified as “*logophobia* in the presence of *the*

¹⁸ The essay traces the photography department’s history, from the arrival in 1935 of Beaumont Newhall, who wrote a history of the medium using art historical methodologies and connoisseurship, to the tenure of Edward Steichen, who took a far more populist approach to curating when he led the department of photography from 1947 to 1962. The essay ends with Szarkowski’s directorship, and his efforts to distinguish himself from his predecessors while reshaping the discourse on photography with his modernist formalism.

¹⁹ Christopher Phillips, “The Judgment Seat of Photography,” in Richard Bolton, ed. *The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989), 15-47. Phillips’s quote appears on page 41.

image.”²⁰ Decrying the elitism of art museums like MoMA in general, where “institutional discourse tends to suppress expression of social concerns,” she also noted that Adams’s failure to seek adequate venues outside the art museum rendered the photographs “weakened statements.”²¹ Abigail Solomon-Godeau went even further in her criticism of Adams’s work for his failure to address politics. She condemned the photographer’s later publication *Our Lives and Our Children: Photographs Taken near the Rocky Flats Nuclear Weapons Plant* (1983) as “a variant...of ethical retardation,” and accused Adams of being a “sentimental humanist” who “had not yet reached the level of political sophistication where hypocrisy is possible.”²² Often, Solomon-Godeau’s criticism of MoMA-supported photographers, akin to that of her *October* colleagues, had less to do with any serious formal reconsideration of the work, but rather with dismantling the credibility of the works’ significance and the museum’s stature.

Much postmodern criticism of Szarkowski’s formalism therefore aimed at breaking the rhetorical stranglehold that critics believed MoMA had over the discourse about art photography. These writers thus did not devote space in their discussions to the aesthetic complexities of these photographers’ works, or to the significance of personal artistic expression, as notions of authorship were themselves being challenged at this time.²³ The ideological goal of much postmodern criticism was to foreground social and political content in photographic practice, and

²⁰ Deborah Bright, “Of Mother Nature and Marlboro Men,” in Bolton, ed., *The Contest of Meaning*, 134.

²¹ Ibid. Bright’s account did not fully consider Adams’s book production as functioning in this manner of extending an audience for his photographs beyond the museum.

²² Abigail Solomon-Godeau, review of “Our Lives and Our Children,” *Exposure* 22:3 (Fall 1984), 53.

²³ Though he did not write about Szarkowski specifically, Roland Barthes problematized the modernist notion of authorship in his well-known essay, “The Death of the Author,” in *Image, Music, Text* (New York: Fontana Press, 1977), 142-148.

to make the institutional politics guiding modernist formalism transparent.²⁴ This critique had a profound influence in academia and effectively challenged formalist art historical models of photographic history as espoused by Szarkowski. Such criticism emphasized instead the significance of the histories of race, gender, and class as important aspects of interpretation, issues that had been neglected in earlier canonical models.²⁵ Postmodern critics in fact challenged the very notion that a canon for photographic history was viable.²⁶ However, because this critical strain had little use for the aesthetic appreciation of photographs as objects, its ideologies had far less of an impact on museum-generated scholarship and practice, which, as stated earlier, has been the primary source for more recent interpretations of the oeuvres of Friedlander, Winogrand, and Adams. There thus has yet to emerge a body of scholarship about the work of these three photographers that fuses Szarkowskian formalism with postmodernist

²⁴ One notable exception is Martha Rosler's thoughtful essay on Lee Friedlander's photographs, "Lee Friedlander's Guarded Strategies," originally published in the April 1975 issue of *Artforum*, and later republished in a variety of critical anthologies, including the retitled essay "Lee Friedlander, an Exemplary Modern Photographer," in Martha Rosler, *Decoys and Disruptions Selected Writings, 1975-2001* (Cambridge, London and New York: MIT Press, in association with International Center of Photography, 2004), 113-131. In this essay, Rosler considers the "cool, gentle disdain" of Friedlander's photographs and notes that while they epitomize "what has become the widespread approach to photography," they also share with pop art the capacity for conveying metacritical meanings through the depiction of mundane, vernacular subjects using a pseudo-amateur style. Rosler thus acknowledges that although the modernist, formalist discourse on Friedlander's photographs has dominated interpretation, the inherent ambiguities in Friedlander's work render it far more complex. As she writes: "Whatever meaning resides in Friedlander's photographs—and it is more than the image management at the Modern has let show—this set of claims allows Friedlander to put forward playfulness and the making of pseudo-propositions as their strategy while identifying some set of formal maneuvers as the essential meaning of their work." (Rosler, *Decoys and Disruptions*, 117.)

²⁵ Canonical models include Beaumont Newhall's *The History of Photography: From 1839 to the Present*, first published in 1937 to coincide with the MoMA exhibition *Photography—1839 to 1937* and printed in five editions. Helmut and Alison Gernsheim's *History of Photography from the Earliest Use of the Camera Obscura in the Eleventh Century to 1914*, published in 1955 and dedicated to Newhall, was another example. Both texts relied on modernist art historical framework, with a linear, chronological narrative that canonized certain gifted practitioners while largely ignoring the medium's more vernacular or commercial uses. These histories also favored white male artists, in the United States and Western Europe, and emphasized the technological progression of the medium as well as its artistic merits. Newhall's publication was considered to be the first classic chronicle of the medium's history, and was widely used in academic art history and studio photography programs across the country throughout the 1970s and 1980s.

²⁶ See in particular Abigail Solomon-Godeau's essay "Canon Fodder: Authoring Eugène Atget," in *Photography at the Dock: Essays on Photographic History, Institutions, and Practices* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 28-51.

concerns for socio-political content. It is the aim of this dissertation to begin to redress that absence, as one means to appreciate the relevance of these photographs by Friedlander, Winogrand, and Adams in the present.

Though each of the four chapters addresses distinct subjects, the essays are united by a chronological framework. I begin my discussion with the year 1963 and end with 1976. This era coincides with what many historians have defined as “the long sixties.” The period commences with the assassination of forty-six year old president John F. Kennedy in 1963, an event that marked the beginning of paradigmatic shifts in national consciousness. Kennedy’s sudden death, seen around the world on television and through the mass media, marked a pivotal moment in the way Americans imagined their place in history. The subsequent 1968 assassinations of Civil Rights leader Martin Luther King Jr., and presidential candidate Robert Kennedy deepened the nation’s psychic confusion. These events, in conjunction with increased and deeply divided public opinion over the escalating war in Vietnam, kept Americans from settling into any unified notion of security or confidence in leadership during these years. This mistrust reached its height with the resignation of president Richard Nixon over the Watergate scandal in 1974.

For many historians, the “long sixties” ends in 1973, with the American defeat in Vietnam, the breaking of the Watergate scandal, and an economic downturn exacerbated by the Arab oil embargo. While 1963 remains an appropriate starting point, I have chosen to identify the end date of my dissertation as 1976, the year of American’s Bicentennial. This year symbolically marks a moment in the national psyche, a few years removed from the traumas of 1973 and Nixon’s resignation as President the following year, when the country looked back at the events of its recent past with a mixture of disdain and hope.

These benchmark dates also have significance with respect to the careers of Friedlander, Winogrand, and Adams. The year 1963 marked a decided shift in Winogrand's practice from capable freelancer to artistic photographer. It was the year Friedlander first articulated the phrase "social landscape" and published his photographs of *The Little Screens* in *Harper's Bazaar*. An end date of 1976 also accommodates the publication of Adams's key book of photographs of the contemporary American West (*The New West*, 1974), as well as his photographs' inclusion in the exhibition *New Topographics* (1975). Winogrand's *Women are Beautiful* also appeared in 1975, and Friedlander's *The American Monument* was published in 1976.

Each of these four chapters addresses various aspects of this period's social and cultural history in greater depth. Chapter One, "Pseudo-Events and Understanding Media in Garry Winogrand's *Public Relations*," reconsiders the body of work Winogrand produced through the auspices of his second Guggenheim fellowship, granted in 1969, for which he photographed the effects of television and the mass media in shaping public events. The increasing ubiquity of television in American households, and the commensurate transference of news and entertainment from print to televisual screen, changed the way Americans experienced and became informed about the world around them. As Marshall McLuhan suggested in his famous dictum, "the medium is the message," it was not so much the content of a given medium that influenced society and culture, but rather its inherent mechanisms which had the abilities to shape human cognition, global communication patterns and thus entire social systems.

Winogrand's photographs in *Public Relations*, packed with people jostling for attention in front of microphones, cameras and related media apparatus, resonate with McLuhan's insights by foregrounding the staged reality of media events, and how these occurrences affected human behavior and notions of self-presentation. The ideas of writer Daniel J. Boorstin are also relevant

to Winogrand's subject. Boorstin described the kinds of public relations that Winogrand photographed as "pseudo-events" and encouraged readers to see beyond the illusions perpetuated by the mass media in order to realign the nation's moral compass.²⁷ Finally, Winogrand's *Public Relations* are fruitfully compared with a body of work by Lee Friedlander, titled *The Little Screens*, which feature television sets aglow in unpeopled domestic interiors. Together, *Public Relations* and *The Little Screens* speak to the increasingly porous boundaries between public and private spheres that television and the media reconfigured during the 1960s and early 1970s.

Chapter Two, "Rethinking Winogrand's Women," reconsiders Garry Winogrand's photographs of women from 1963 to 1975, focusing on images published in *Women are Beautiful* (1975). The chapter situates the circumstances shaping the book's conception within the heated socio-political context of the women's liberation movement and sexual revolution of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Manhattan's urban spaces had a cultural relevance for women during this time, as sites of political protest, bodily display, and voyeurism. My conception of Winogrand's street photography is thus historically situated, and differs from the conventional, ahistorical model of the genre that describes the city's public spaces as a "street theatre" from which photographers like Winogrand extracted isolated moments, arranging his subjects in dynamic compositions and unexpected juxtapositions.²⁸ Such traditional conceptions of Winogrand's street photography ignore the significance of gender relations during this period. Anxieties over newly defined roles for women, changing laws and social attitudes over a woman's right to have agency over her own sexuality, and the self-confidence that many young women displayed through self-presentation were at the forefront of political dialogues at the time

²⁷ Boorstin makes this argument in his book *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America* (New York: Vintage Books, 1961).

²⁸ For an example of this rhetorical model, see Colin Westerbeck and Joel Meyerowitz, *Bystander: A History of Street Photography* (Boston, New York, and London: Bullfinch Press, 2001).

Winogrand was making photographs for *Women are Beautiful*. Such debates inevitably affected the way Winogrand was drawn to particular female subjects on the streets of New York City, as well as the way the photographs were initially interpreted. These social changes also coincided with a rise in the mediated experience of public life, a topic Winogrand explored in his *Public Relations* series (addressed in Chapter One). Though *Women are Beautiful* has often been routinely condemned as sexist, voyeuristic, and at worst, misogynist, Winogrand's most interesting pictures from this body of work suggest a degree of agency in his female subjects and a complicated set of encounters between men and women that highlight the act of voyeurism itself.

Chapter Three, “‘To See The Facts Without Blinking’: Robert Adams and the Romantic Tradition as Seen in the New American West” proposes a new interpretation of Adams's photographs of suburban sprawl and industrial development around the Denver metropolitan area during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Suburban development during this period contributed to a major shift in American living patterns. Fueled by federal financing and affordable housing guarantees for U.S. veterans, suburban housing boomed, particularly for white middle-class Americans who left cities in large numbers.²⁹ With the passing of the Federal Highway Act of 1956, 41,000 miles of interstate were authorized, thus facilitating faster and more frequent cross-country travel. Cars became the predominant means of transportation between city and suburb, and mediated direct experience of the landscape.³⁰

²⁹ According to sociologist and writer Todd Gitlin, eighty-five percent of all new housing outside of farms between the years 1946 and 1958 was built outside cities. Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (New York: Bantam Books, 1993), 45.

³⁰ On the one hand, “automobility” symbolized freedom, providing autonomy and reliability for a new generation of (largely male) commuters during the 1950s and 1960s. The highway itself became a romantic symbol of adventure, freedom, and liberation from social constraints, as epitomized by Jack Kerouac's famous Beat generation novel, *On the Road* (published in 1957). On the other hand, many viewed American dependence on automobiles, particularly between city and suburb, as an imposition, exacerbating familial and social alienation by becoming—literally and

Robert Adams pictures this landscape of white middle-class suburban America as it transformed the undeveloped natural areas around his home in Denver, Colorado. Though Adams's photographs were initially seen as anti-romantic statements when first exhibited and published in the early 1970s, their philosophical underpinnings were, as I argue, rooted in Romanticism; specifically, a long tradition of American Transcendentalist thought and environmental writing by such figures as Wallace Stegner, Edward Abbey, and the lesser-known, Denver-based poet Thomas Hornsby Ferril. Adams's photographs, which suggest an endangered pastoral ideal wherein humanity and nature are increasingly out of balance, may thus be interpreted as a sobering plea for environmental awareness as well as a means to uphold his own personal belief in the American West as an enduring romantic symbol, despite his own deeply felt personal despair about the future of the land and people's place within it.³¹

Chapter Four, "Lee Friedlander's *The American Monument*: Commemoration and Dislocation in Bicentennial America," will focus on Lee Friedlander's book *The American Monument*, situating this body of work within the context of the country's conflicted sense of history, memorialization, and national identity in the aftermath of the social movements of the

metaphorically—the vehicles for a life of exhausting drudgery. Automobility drove deeper divides between middle-class white suburbanites and working or lower class minorities, whose urban neighborhoods were often the first to be decimated and divided by highway construction plans. Automobiles were also considered dangerous. Ralph Nader's *Unsafe at Any Speed* (1965)—a polemical yet highly convincing attack on the automobile industry—excoriated corporations' unwillingness to compromise comfort for the sake of safety and the polluting effects of automobiles on air quality.

³¹ Several key events defined the American environmental movement of this period. The publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962), which detailed horrific accounts of the dangers of DDT and other chemical industrial by-products to human beings and the environment, is often cited as marking the beginning of the post-World War II environmental movement. The book inspired a public outcry, and was a driving force behind the governmental ban on DDT in 1970. Other significant examples of the country's growing awareness of environmental concerns included the founding of several non-profit organizations such as the World Wildlife Fund (founded 1961) and Greenpeace (founded in 1967 as the Don't Make a Wave Committee, becoming Greenpeace in 1971). Additionally, the U.S. government passed the first Clean Air Act (1963), and in that same year the U. S. and Russia crafted a Nuclear Ban Treaty, outlawing all above-ground testing of nuclear weapons. The National Environmental Policy Act was established in 1969, and the Environmental Protection Agency was founded in 1970. The first Earth Day was celebrated on April 22, 1970.

1960s, and in the more immediate wake of the Vietnam War and Watergate. By the mid-1970s, the sense of rebellion, idealism, and liberation that characterized the 1960s gave way to a growing cynicism, distrust, and malaise amidst the nation's economic recession.³² Writing about the 1970s at the end of the decade, Christopher Lasch asserted that America, in the throes of late-capitalist moral disintegration, was irrevocably fractured. Americans, he argued, in their single-minded pursuit of material and spiritual self-fulfillment, had essentially abandoned their commitment to a common greater good.³³ To many cultural critics and historians, the 1970s symbolized a collective ambivalence towards past and the future, prompting a pervasive sentiment that American life seemed to be lacking in any deeper moral or political purpose.

The 213 photographs that comprise *The American Monument* suggest this mood of national uncertainty. Made on various road trips taken by Friedlander during the late 1960s and early 1970s, these photographs picture civic monuments located in small towns, city parks, tourist destinations, and suburban settings across the United States. Often, these structures are shown, through Friedlander's lens, in unheroic spaces: surrounded by parked cars, discarded soda cans, or against the visual cacophony of advertising billboards and scaffolding. Friedlander's signature aesthetic, which is characterized by spatial compression, witty juxtapositions, and a lack of conventional pictorial hierarchy, render these subjects and their settings such that it is impossible to fully glean whether his intentions are ironic or nostalgic. Nonetheless, such formal and spatial ambiguities may be seen to reflect the pervasive sentiment

³² In 1976, the nation's Bicentennial year, Jimmy Carter was narrowly elected president for his promise to provide new leadership that would heal the country and restore national faith in the common good. However, he ended the decade, and his presidency, with a speech on July 15, 1979 in which he declared America's most trenchant problem to be a "crisis of confidence" that "strikes at the very heart and soul and spirit of our national will," and revealed a "growing doubt about the meaning of our own lives" and a loss of national purpose. Carter ended the decade with abysmal poll numbers amidst rising inflation, increasing urban decay, fuel shortages, and the Iranian hostage crises.

³³ Lasch makes this argument in his book *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1979).

of psychic dislocation and disillusionment that characterized the national mood in 1976, as Americans looked back to their own past as a means of coming to terms with an uncertain present and future.

The chapters of this dissertation broadly address the issues outlined in this introduction, with each chapter providing a largely independent means of approaching the topics. There are nonetheless chronological and thematic threads that weave the chapters together and justify their ordering. I have endeavored to organize them such that my first chapter includes a discussion of the earliest body of work—Lee Friedlander’s *The Little Screens*—and my last chapter focuses on Friedlander’s *The American Monument* which appeared during America’s Bicentennial year, the chronological terminus of my study. Within this structure, indirect connections may be made between and among the chapters, such that readers might emerge with a multi-faceted (versus linear) understanding of how these three important photographers approached the American social landscape of this period using a similar documentary-style aesthetic.

Ultimately, Winogrand, Friedlander, and Adams employed the rhetoric of documentary-style photography to picture an American social landscape that was in the throes of radical social and political change. This aesthetic approach, as stated previously, distinguished their photographs from precedents in popular photojournalism and expressive fine art photography. I would also propose, however, that for these photographers and the institutions, like MoMA, that supported and promoted their work, the documentary-style aesthetic was the most effective means for trying to make sense of the visual chaos they encountered in this changing social landscape. Suspicious of the media, skeptical of advertising and political agendas, and uninterested in using photography to explore personal psychology or metaphor, these photographers nonetheless believed that the medium retained the capacity to effectively say

something new about the world with which they actively engaged, even if they themselves did not wish to say much about the social content of their images. It should be noted that Winogrand and Friedlander differed from Adams on this point of acknowledging the relationship between their photographic practice and social concerns. Winogrand and Friedlander, who did not, by and large, write about their work (Friedlander in particular), were comfortable with allowing formalist rhetoric address (or deflect) questions about the photographers' moral and political responsibility to his subjects. Adams, though he certainly admired and embraced Szarkowski's ideas about photography, was less content with allowing the curator to serve as the sole voice about his work. As becomes apparent through his own highly articulate writings about photography and aesthetics, Adams felt the documentary-style approach was the most viable means for picturing, as he described it, "the facts without blinking."³⁴ It was also for him a personal spiritual exercise, an attempt to see beyond these same facts to find a deeper moral purpose for humanity in a landscape he felt was becoming irrevocably damaged at the hands of ill-conceived human interventions. The photographer's environmental consciousness is also readily apparent in his essays. Thus, while Adams did tend to keep his writing separate from his photographs when they were exhibited, he combined them to a greater degree in his publications, a factor that distinguishes his practice from that of Friedlander and Winogrand.

In summary, the four chapters that collectively constitute this dissertation aim not only to resituate the works of Friedlander, Winogrand, and Adams within the historical context that shaped their subject matter—the American social landscape of this period, 1963-1976—but also to historicize the formalist ideas about photography espoused by John Szarkowski. The close alignment of these photographers with the influential MoMA curator was a primary cause for the dismissal of the photographers' significance in much academic discourse during the 1980s and

³⁴ Robert Adams, introduction to *The New West* (Boulder: Colorado Associated Press, 1974), 11.

1990s, when postmodern critics effectively dismantled the rhetorical framework that Szarkowski had established. As previously stated, the photographs of Friedlander, Winogrand, and Adams have received a degree of renewed attention through museum exhibitions and publications in the past thirteen years. However, few of these efforts elaborate on the socio-political circumstances, or make contemporary literary connections, that can fruitfully be brought to bear on interpretation. This dissertation thus seeks to fill that gap in the scholarship, by offering fresh interpretations of photographs that picture a media-saturated, politically uncertain American social landscape that remains wholly relevant to our own historical moment.

Chapter One: Pseudo-Events and Understanding Media in Garry Winogrand's *Public Relations*

In 1970, Garry Winogrand photographed the boxer Muhammad Ali as he spoke to reporters at a press conference in New York City to promote his upcoming fight with Argentinean heavyweight champion Oscar Bonavena. In Winogrand's picture, Ali, who appears confident and physically imposing, stands before a battery of microphones and a swarm of reporters at the left of the composition [fig. 1.1]. Several white, male journalists converge around the fighter, extending their arms and thrusting microphones branded with corporate logos towards him. To the right of the picture, a man holds a 35mm camera to his eyes, and aims it in Ali's direction, while another photographer, kneeling on the ground, examines his camera. As Ali speaks, a man wearing a striped shirt crouches in the center of the crowd and grins broadly, hinting at the farcicality with which Ali often addressed the press in his public relations campaigns.

Winogrand's photograph of Ali epitomizes the photographer's characteristic ability to condense into a single frame the dynamism of human subjects as they jostle for space and attention in the hype of the press conference's public arena. The photograph derives from a project on which Winogrand worked primarily between 1969 and 1973, funded by a 1969 Guggenheim fellowship, to photograph "the effect of the media on events."³⁵ This series, exhibited and published by MoMA as *Public Relations* in 1977, includes pictures of political assemblies, street rallies, cultural celebrations, social gatherings, press conferences, and other

³⁵ This statement is taken from Winogrand's Guggenheim application, as quoted by Tod Papageorge in his catalogue essay for *Public Relations* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1977), 14.

events that were conceived and staged in anticipation of media coverage.³⁶ The titles of the photographs are simple and factually descriptive, citing the general event depicted, its geographic location, and the date.

The catalogue essay for *Public Relations*, written by fellow photographer and exhibition curator Tod Papageorge, also offers few specifics regarding the subjects of Winogrand's images. Scant socio-historical context is provided, despite the fact that the images represent subjects that would have been recognized as the news of the day. These included: peace demonstrations in Central Park in 1969, a press conference for the Apollo 11 space mission in Cape Kennedy Florida in 1969, hard-hat rallies protesting the policies of New York Mayor John Lindsay in 1969, the Kent State Demonstration in Washington D.C. in 1970, and rallies for women's liberation and gay rights in 1971, among other events. Rather than elaborate on the historical moments depicted in Winogrand's photographs, Papageorge primarily discusses the images using a formalist rhetoric that emphasizes the separation between a photographic representation of a subject, and the idea (a misunderstanding, in Papageorge's estimation) that documentary-style photographs like those of Winogrand should have a "moral responsibility" to the subjects depicted, simply because they show them in an unmanipulated manner.³⁷ To underscore this sentiment, Papageorge quotes Winogrand: "A photograph is the illusion of literal description of a

³⁶ The catalogue for *Public Relations* includes a total of sixty-eight published images in the plate section; the exhibition itself included seventy-six prints.

³⁷ My use of the term "unmanipulated" refers to the idea that the photographs Winogrand made were neither staged to be photographed, nor were the prints produced using darkrooms techniques aimed at significantly changing the appearance of the information embedded in the negative once printed. Such overt manipulations might include, for example, the use of extreme burning and dodging techniques, special filters or papers to affect extremes in contrast, toning baths, or the use of double exposures and radical cropping. In reality, no photographic prints are ever truly unmanipulated. In a conceptual sense, all photographs reflect the photographer's subjective proclivities. In a formal sense, variations in darkroom chemistry and print exposure, as well as the type of paper used, inevitably affect the physical appearance of the photographic print as an object.

piece of time and space.”³⁸ Such statements, while emphasizing the notion that all photographs are representations and should not, therefore, be confused with objective records of a subject found in the real world, nonetheless served to divorce the relevance of social context from “photographic” form in the interpretation of Winogrand’s pictures.

Papageorge also elaborates on Winogrand’s biography, and stresses the significance of authorship for interpretation. As he writes: “the best photographs” are those “with the right objects in the right position.”³⁹ Papageorge felt that the “rightness” of Winogrand’s composition was a “constellated density...a process only the most disinterested and active mind would attempt.”⁴⁰ This statement thus reflects Papageorge’s idea that Winogrand’s unique artistic talents and intentions are essential for understanding the works’ meaning: “only the most disinterested and active mind would attempt” to make photographic sense of the chaotic tangle of visual facts with which we are confronted, and that mind belongs to Winogrand. The implication that Winogrand was a “disinterested” photographer neatly aligns with the rhetoric of documentary- style “neutrality,” wherein the photographer strove to maintain a moral and political distance from his subject.

As addressed in my Introduction, the rhetoric of documentary-style photography that arose during the 1960s and early 1970s derived in part from a perceived need to create a new aesthetic for serious photographic practice, one that differed significantly from popular photojournalism as well as a strain of expressive art photography during the 1950s that espoused the medium’s metaphoric and symbolic potentials. To highlight the distinct stylistic character of Winogrand’s photographs, and to perpetuate Winogrand’s status as a unique and important

³⁸ Winogrand, quoted in *Public Relations*, 15.

³⁹ Papageorge, *Public Relations*, 15.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 16.

talent, Papageorge thus distinguished the photographer's images from their precedents. For Papageorge, the fact that Winogrand's photographs lacked the stylistic signifiers of artistic photography from previous decades (the "elegant constructions that flatten the picture plane," or the "luminous blurs, or mystifying truncations," as Papageorge describes them) was a strength. Winogrand's approach thus represented a new kind of photographic practice: one in which the photographer translates subjects he encounters in real life into photographic form, or what Papageorge describes, in poetic terms, as a "theatre of quick takes, foreshortenings, and contingencies."⁴¹ These formal qualities, according to Papageorge, were the most essential aspects of Winogrand's street photography.

In Winogrand's 1970 photograph of Muhammad Ali's press conference, however, it becomes apparent that history itself intercedes and necessarily affects interpretation. As contemporary viewers, our knowledge of Ali as a cultural icon of the time, understood more fully, perhaps, in hindsight, colors our appreciation of this photograph's significance and its potential meanings. In addition, a more thorough understanding of the history surrounding this press conference, the symbolic stature of Ali as a persona, and the impact that television and the mass media had on filtering Americans' reception of news and entertainment during the 1960s and 1970s, opens up broader possibilities for interpreting the significance of Winogrand's photographs for contemporary viewers. Papageorge's rhetoric—articulate and insightful though it may have been at the time—cannot accommodate the inevitable interpretive shift that occurs over time.

This chapter will reconsider select photographs from Garry Winogrand's *Public Relations* by situating them within the broader dialogue about the role television and the mass

⁴¹ Ibid., 16.

media played in transforming the American social landscape of this period. As a corollary to this discussion, and as a comparison with Winogrand's images, I will also consider a series of photographs by Winogrand's friend and contemporary, Lee Friedlander, titled *The Little Screens*. This body of work, made between 1960 and 1970, was first published as a small portfolio of six images in *Harper's Bazaar* in 1963.⁴² Friedlander's photographs depict television sets aglow in domestic and motel interiors, and are largely devoid of people. These images, which are as visually subdued as Winogrand's are dynamic, serve as a counterpoint to *Public Relations*. Considered together, *The Little Screens* and *Public Relations* address the pervasive influence that television and the mass media had on reshaping the boundaries between private and public spheres during the 1960s and early 1970s. Informing this analysis are the writings of two central figures, Daniel J. Boorstin and Marshall McLuhan, who contributed to the broader cultural dialogue about TV and the media during this period.⁴³

Part I: Photographing "the effect of the media on events" in *Public Relations*

By the time Winogrand made his photograph of Muhammad Ali, the fighter was already considered a symbol of the times. In addition to his boxing prowess, Ali was known for his outspoken political views. He changed his name from Cassius Clay at the time of his conversion to the Nation of Islam in 1964, and in 1967 was stripped of his world heavyweight title and boxing license by the New York State Athletic Commission when he declared himself a conscientious objector to the Vietnam War on religious grounds. While Ali awaited an appeal to the U. S. Supreme Court to overturn the decision, Ali's rival Joe Frazier assumed the title of World Heavyweight Champion after winning a bout in February 1970 against Jimmy Ellis. As

⁴² The images were accompanied by a brief introductory essay by Walker Evans. See Evans, "The Little Screens," *Harper's Bazaar*, February 1963, 129.

⁴³ In particular, Boorstin's 1961 publication *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America* and McLuhan's *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (1964) figure prominently in this discussion.

public dissent against the Vietnam War intensified, Ali's popularity continued to grow, and by October of 1970, Ali was allowed to fight again in the state of New York. On June 28, 1971 his boxing license was fully reinstated. The Ali-Bonavena match, which took place on December 7, 1970, was in fact a precursor to a much more eagerly anticipated bout between Ali and Frazier that many hoped would (and eventually did) take place the following year. Winogrand's photograph of Ali's press conference was thus made at a critical juncture in Ali's career, as he sought to reestablish his public image as "the greatest."⁴⁴

Ali fascinated his contemporaries in the fields of journalism, athletics, photojournalism, and literature and assumed an iconic status.⁴⁵ He also fundamentally changed the way the press covered the sport of boxing. Sports journalist Jimmy Cannon wrote of this phenomenon in 1970:

He [Ali] is all that the sixties were. It is as though he were created to represent them. In him is the trouble and the wildness and the hysterical gladness and the nonsense and the rebellion and the conflicts of race and the yearning for bizarre religions and the cult of the put-on and the changed values that altered the world and the feeling about Vietnam in the generation that ridicules what their parents cherish.⁴⁶

Cannon's perspective is particularly telling, in that he himself was not a fan of Ali's bravado, particularly in his early years of covering the young boxer's fights. According to journalist and editor David Remnick, Cannon came from an earlier generation of sportswriters for whom Ali "upset the natural order of things" by refusing to conform to previously held, racially biased

⁴⁴ Szarkowski actually compared Winogrand to the fighter at one point in his career. In a letter dated August 1975, after Winogrand had moved to take a teaching position at the University of Texas at Austin, the curator compares the photographer's "comeback" to that of Ali: "All reports from Austin agree that you have come back like a Mohammed [sic] Ali." Letter from John Szarkowski to Garry Winogrand, August 27, 1975. Garry Winogrand Archives, Correspondence, ca. 1940-1984, Center for Creative Photography, The University of Arizona, AG 72:1.

⁴⁵ Tom Wolfe, Gordon Parks, and Jackie Robinson wrote about Ali in the 1960s; Norman Mailer and Hunter S. Thomson in the 1970s; Wolye Solinka and Joyce Carol Oates in the 1980s and 1990s. See *The Muhammad Ali Reader*, edited by Gerald Early (Hopewell, NJ: The Ecco Press, 1998).

⁴⁶ Jimmy Cannon, "Cassius Clay is the Sixties," reprinted in *The Muhammad Ali Reader*, 81-82.

presumptions about how an African American male sports figure “should” behave.⁴⁷ To Cannon, Ali was politically outspoken, arrogant, and “all pretense and gas.”⁴⁸ Cannon and others of his generation did not, at first, see any fun or irony in Ali’s chicanery: they took his arrogance seriously, accustomed as they were to older fighters like Joe Louis, who was seen to conform to (white) expectations of his behavior and spoke deferentially to the press, accepting his victories without bragging. As the 1960s progressed, however, and with it the continued success of the civil rights movement and increasing dissent about the war in Vietnam, Cannon’s view became one of begrudging acceptance. As the younger sportswriter Robert Lipsyte, noted: “Clay did not need the sportswriters as a prism to find his way. He transcended the sports press,”⁴⁹ and in the process, fundamentally changed the way the press covered his sport. As Remnick notes, Ali was “in large part, responsible for their new view of the American scene.”⁵⁰

Winograd’s photograph of Ali’s 1970 press conference gains greater complexity with this historical knowledge: not only did the photographer picture an event staged specifically to garner press, but he also pictured a subject—Muhammad Ali—who was perceived to have changed the very nature of media coverage itself. One of the reasons Ali captivated so many writers is that no one could say with certainty the degree to which he truly believed what he was saying when he spoke to the press. Remnick asserts that Ali “never really lied to the press; he believed what he was saying in the moment he was saying it.”⁵¹ The writer Norman Mailer,

⁴⁷ David Remnick, *How Muhammad Ali Changed the Press* (Notre Dame: Universal Press Syndicate, 1998), 10, 7. The quote regarding upsetting the natural order of things was taken from Robert Lipsyte, a younger reporter who also covered sports in the 1960s, and who represented a new, more receptive voice to issues of race in sports.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 10.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 10.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 11.

⁵¹ Ibid., 10.

however, called him a “trickster in a culture of irony,”⁵² a media-savvy young man who well understood the value of hype and controversy when addressing a media that understood, at least in part, by the 1970s, that it was part of the game, too.

Mailer could easily have claimed the title of “media trickster” for himself. Like Ali, his appeal for Winogrand as a subject in *Public Relations* suggests a complex understanding of the relationship between Mailer as a controversial public figure and his manipulation of and by the press. Five photographs in *Public Relations* were taken at Norman Mailer’s fiftieth birthday party: two of the images depict Mailer himself, while the other three are views of the party’s attendees. In one image, Mailer stands behind a podium, supporting himself with his left elbow while he leans forward, ostensibly listening to a woman who stands in front of him. Several other figures also gather around the writer [fig. 1.2]. Though Mailer’s interaction with these individuals is a significant component of the picture’s composition, the figural grouping is by no means the central focus. Given notable formal presence is the podium microphone, and visible in the right background is a man holding a 35mm camera to his face, and a rectangular flash held aloft. The physical apparatus of the media, therefore, is as much part of the subject as is Mailer himself.

Interestingly, none of the five images Winogrand took at Mailer’s birthday party picture the writer making the disastrous speech that actually took place at this event, a \$50 a couple party that occurred on February 5, 1972 at the Four Seasons restaurant in New York City.⁵³ Though billed as a birthday celebration, the event was promoted by Mailer, the self-proclaimed

⁵² Norman Mailer, “Ego,” first printed in *Life*, March 19, 1971. Reprinted in *The Muhammad Ali Reader*, 101.

⁵³ The great expense was itself meant to stir hostilities between the “dazzling” array of socialites who were “unaccustomed to paying their way to any party,” and the press, who were also used to coming free of charge. See Mel Gussow, “Mailer’s Guests (\$50 a Couple) Hear his Plan on ‘Secret Police,’” *New York Times*, February 6, 1973.

“embattled aging *enfant terrible* of the literary world,” as a venue at which an announcement of “national importance” was to be made. This hype, and the public’s hunger to hear what Mailer had to say was enough to draw a crowd of 550 guests and ensure press coverage.⁵⁴ Mailer, anticipating as much, noted with caustic wit: “the most useful party ingredient in a city so evil as New York is curiosity...New York, I knew, would not come to the birthday, but to the secret.”⁵⁵

Mailer’s announcement, made after imbibing several bourbons, turned out to be an ill-conceived, poorly delivered appeal to form “the Fifth Estate,” a “democratic secret police to keep tabs on the FBI and CIA.” Mailer’s reference suggested that the Fourth Estate, a term established in the nineteenth century to identify “the Press,” needed its own watchdog agency to determine “how far paranoia [was] justified.”⁵⁶ John Leonard, reporting on the event in the *New York Times* one week after its occurrence, wrote that Mailer’s speech was largely a disaster. Even the author’s “magical command on our attention,” his pride in being able to manipulate a hostile audience, and his willingness to set himself up as a scapegoat by presenting such an outrageous announcement fell short.⁵⁷ Mailer himself agreed, noting: “The speech was a disgrace. It had neither wit nor life—perhaps the worst speech on a real occasion the orator ever made.”⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Ibid. 5,000 invitations were mailed, and attendees included film directors, artists, entertainers, writers, aristocrats, and politicians, as well as members of the press.

⁵⁵ Norman Mailer, “The Morning After,” *New York Times*, March 11, 1973.

⁵⁶ See Gussow, “Mailer’s Guests (\$50 a Couple) Hear His Plan on ‘Secret Police’” and John Leonard, “Happy Birthday, Norman Mailer!,” *New York Times*, February 18, 1973.

⁵⁷ Leonard, 23.

⁵⁸ Mailer’s self-excoriation, written up in a *New York Times* article one month after the party, accompanied an attempt to clarify his reasoning. Citing the anguish of the previous decade—in which Americans experienced “the assassination of the Kennedys, of Oswald, Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, the shooting of George Wallace, and Watergate,” not to mention the continued horrors of the Vietnam War—Mailer reflected that perhaps it was impossible to deliver a “reasonable and decent explanation of the concept of a Fifth Estate.” For him, it would require nothing less than an inquiry “into the fundamental question of government,” an investigation, he noted, that

Winogrand's photograph clearly conveys both the staged quality of the event and its momentary significance by giving prominence to the podium, the cameras, and foremost the empty microphone, whose metallic shaft is illuminated by a burst of light. This flare was most likely created as a result of a camera flash—possibly Winogrand's own. The reflection thus signifies a brief moment in time, one that lasts only as long as the camera's exposure, and underscores the fleeting nature of public relations conceived for the sole purpose of creating hype.

As suggested by these pictures of Ali and Mailer, the subject of many of Winogrand's *Public Relations* images is not simply the staging of events to create news and entertainment. These two men were media creations as well as purveyors of media attention, and it is this self-perpetuating circularity that Winogrand conveys in these two images through his compositional choices. Because Winogrand himself worked for years as a freelance photographer, first as a photojournalist and later for advertising agencies (his photographs appeared in such magazines as *Collier's*, *Sports Illustrated*, *Redbook* and *Harper's Bazaar*), he was well attuned to the way such "news" was constructed. As Papageorge notes: "He concluded there was little difference between the pictures he had been asked to make as a photojournalist and those he set up for agencies: both were designed to manipulate an audience."⁵⁹ Winogrand's most cogent articulation of this realization, as well an acknowledgment of his own role in perpetuating such imagery, appeared in his first Guggenheim application in 1963:⁶⁰

the press was incapable of pursuing, since it could not "persevere at such a job any more than a cork can navigate." Mailer, 431.

⁵⁹ Papageorge, *Public Relations*, 11.

⁶⁰ Winogrand's first Guggenheim, awarded in 1964, was granted to make "photographic studies of American life." The second, awarded in 1968, was to photograph "the effect of media on events." The third, awarded in 1978, was to photograph in California. See Szarkowski, *Winogrand: Figments from the Real World* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1988), 249-252.

I look at the pictures I have done up to now, and they make me feel that who we are and how we feel and what is to become of us just doesn't matter. Our aspirations and successes have been cheap and petty. I read the newspapers, the columnists, some books, I look at the magazines [our press]. They all deal in illusions and fantasies. I can only conclude that we have lost ourselves...and it just doesn't matter, we have not loved life.⁶¹

Significantly, he added as a final statement: "I cannot accept my conclusions, and so I must continue this photographic investigation."⁶²

Winogrand's insights into the deceptive nature of photographs produced for magazine and editorial work ("they all deal in illusions and fantasies," as he stated in this quote), relate directly to the ideas of cultural historian Daniel J. Boorstin as articulated in his 1961 book *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America*. Though Winogrand himself did not make direct reference to Boorstin's book in his 1969 Guggenheim application, nor is there any evidence that he read *The Image*, Papageorge did make this connection, albeit quite loosely, in his wall label. As he noted: "By the late 1960s, Boorstein's [sic] conception of ersatz ritual was endemic to, and, in fact, seemed to be, the American environment, and Winogrand, armed as he was with a pilgrim's energy and the devil's own intelligence, understood it well."⁶³

For Boorstin, Americans at the start of the 1960s were, through the misguided use of wealth, literacy, and technology, unable to see through the "thicket of unreality" which stood between them and the facts of life.⁶⁴ They had lost a sense of national purpose and were caught in a collective state of "self-hypnosis," deluded by "extravagant expectations" that both dictated

⁶¹ Reprinted in Trudy Wilner Stack, *Winogrand 1964* (Santa Fe: Arena Editions, 2002), 13.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 13.

⁶³ "Public Relations." Press release, wall label, and exhibition checklist. October 17-December 11, 1977. MoMA Archives, New York.

⁶⁴ Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America* (New York: Vintage Books, 1961), 3.

behavior and left Americans feeling “deceived and more disappointed” when they inevitably failed to meet such impossible expectations.⁶⁵ Boorstin felt that these deceptions were due in large part to a shift in post-World War II media tactics, which created an enormous supply and demand for such imagery. As he noted: “The making of the illusions which flood our experience has become the business of America.”⁶⁶ He included in his assessment of the “illusion makers” not only advertising and public relations agencies, but also journalists, politicians, and entertainers. “We should try to reach outside our images,” Boorstin wrote. “We must discover our illusions before we can even recognize that we’ve been sleepwalking.”⁶⁷ This admonition resonates directly with Winogrand’s final statement in his Guggenheim application, wherein the photographer asserts that he “cannot accept” the “illusions and fantasies” perpetuated by the press, and thus felt compelled to make a different kind of photograph; one that might reveal such visual deceptions for what they were.

Winogrand’s images for *Public Relations*, revealing as they do the mechanical underpinnings of staged media events, are convincingly read as showing the “pseudo-events” that, in Boorstin’s view, had come to dominate American media coverage in the post-World War II era. Boorstin defined “pseudo-events” as a “new kind of synthetic novelty which has flooded our experience,” encouraging individuals to seek out self-deluding, self-fulfilling prophecies. “Newsworthy” events were no longer seen as being spontaneous, but came about “because someone has planned, planted or incited it.”⁶⁸ The numerous reporters, photographers, microphones, cameras, film crews, tape recorders, flashbulbs, and podiums that appear in

⁶⁵ Ibid., 10.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 9.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 261.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 11.

Winogrand's *Public Relations* speak to this lack of spontaneity, and give credence to Boorstin's words by showing the material means through which news is created.

Part II: The End of *Life* and the Rise of the Global Village

To understand the way that Winogrand's *Public Relations* images functioned critically, taking as they did the media and its mechanisms as subject matter, a brief historical summation of the shifts that occurred in media coverage, from print to television, is useful.

Television, which grew, in part, out of the precedent of radio broadcasting, fundamentally changed the way most Americans consumed news and entertainment in the postwar era. TV displaced such popular picture magazines as *Life*, *Look*, and *Collier's* (to name a few) as the prime provider of shared, visual experience. Of these publications, *Life* was the most popular in America, and its cessation symbolized the demise of printed general interest, photographically illustrated news and entertainment sources. The end of *Life* magazine was not entirely due to television's ascendancy as the primary vehicle for news and information, however. The magazine also suffered from an inability to keep pace with the shift in generational tastes. *Life* was established in 1936 as a weekly publication when purchased by Henry Luce. Its purpose, as often stated, was broadly humanist: "to see life; to see the world; to eyewitness great events; to watch the faces of the poor and the gestures of the proud," and it was meant to appeal to a general, mass audience of like-minded readers. During the 1960s, however, the magazine became increasingly unsure of its audience. As cultural historian John Gennari suggests, many of *Life's* problems arose as a result of its inability to engage with a new generation of readers, many of whom grew up with television as children, and found the lifestyle and values reinforced in *Life's* pages neither acceptable nor desirable.⁶⁹ The more conservative principles upon which a

⁶⁹ Brock Brower, "A First-Rank Writer's Reckless Quest for—What?," *Life*, September 24, 1965, 94-116.

magazine like *Life* was founded were being fundamentally challenged in the 1960s. The “new journalism” of writers like Mailer, Tom Wolfe, and Hunter S. Thompson, which applied fictional literary techniques to nonfictional and often politically controversial topics, appealed to a younger generation of readers in new publications such as *New York*, *Esquire*, and *Rolling Stone* which competed with *Life* for this demographic. In *Life*’s final issue, Ralph Graves, a writer, reporter, and finally managing editor for the magazine, attempted to summarize the magazine’s overarching endeavor. He noted: “we tried to talk to you across all barriers and special interests...as people who share the common experience of humanity.”⁷⁰ By 1970, however, this notion of a shared, “common experience of humanity” that guided the content and consumption of *Life* during the 1950s had been upended, effectively challenged by the major social and political movements of the 1960s which proved such universal claims to be flawed presumptions that had ignored the realities of gender, race, and class inequities.

This shift in cultural values coincided with a radical increase in presence of television in American middle-class homes. Television existed more or less as an experiment throughout the 1930s, while radio remained the dominant type of broadcast media.⁷¹ In 1941 NBC and CBS saw potential in the new medium and began limited broadcasts from New York (ABC turned to TV in 1943), but television generated little excitement in radio and film circles until around 1948,⁷²

⁷⁰ Ralph Graves, “With Pride and Affection,” *Life*, December 29, 1972, 96.

⁷¹ According to Asa Briggs and Peter Burke, there were 14 million radio sets in use by 1930, which marked the beginning of the medium’s golden era as a mass form of communication and entertainment. See Briggs and Burke, *A Social History of the Media; From Gutenberg to the Internet* (Cambridge, England: Polity Press, 2005), 179.

⁷² Much of this delayed interest in the medium’s potential had to do with a misperception regarding audience demand: many felt television would only appeal to a high-income group, which turned out to be a gross miscalculation. Briggs and Burke, 189.

when consumer demand increased, and the number of TV sets rose from 178,00 to around 15 million in 1956.⁷³

Not surprisingly, as TV gained popularity, it was both celebrated and reviled by critics. In his 1948 book *Here is Television*, one of the earliest in-depth studies of the mechanics and apparatus of the medium, Thomas H. Hutchinson speculated about television's impact for the future, highlighting its efficiency in bringing "events of national importance...sporting events, drama, news, music, and every known type of entertainment" with the simple turn of the dial.⁷⁴ Not all writers and critics were as optimistic about television's potential. Its educational value and informational depth were hotly debated. Intellectuals and pundits found great fodder for witty critical commentary. Frank Lloyd Wright called it "chewing gum" for the eyes, while comedian Ernie Kovacs joked that "television is a medium because it is neither rare nor well done."⁷⁵

The most serious concerns regarding television related to the manner in which it changed the nature of press coverage.⁷⁶ As television supplanted newspapers and magazines, viewers saw shocking events unfold before their eyes, without ever having to leave the comfort of their living room chairs. This sparked a cognitive dissonance for many Americans, who suddenly had to recalibrate their relationship to current affairs, as TV became a regular presence in middle-class

⁷³ Ibid., 189.

⁷⁴ Thomas H. Hutchinson, *Here is Television* (New York: Hastings House, 1948), 10. By 1955, television was installed in nearly two-thirds of American households, and by 1960, almost 90 percent of American homes had at least one receiver, with the average amount of TV watched per day averaging five hours. See Lynn Spigel, *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 1.

⁷⁵ Briggs and Burke, 197.

⁷⁶ As Lynn Spigel argues, these anxieties about television emerged from a long history of fears and utopian visions that date back to the invention of the telegraph and other late nineteenth-century forms of electronic communication. See Spigel, 3.

homes. All major political events of the 1960s were televised. Coverage of the Vietnam War marked a watershed in media history, as it was the first war to be viewed (albeit selectively) on TV screens. The civil rights and women's liberation movements were also transformed by exposure through television. Though JFK's assassination was first announced by sound, a steady stream of television pictures soon followed. In 1962 the world watched as John Glenn became the first American to orbit the earth, and in 1969, 125 million Americans and 723 million viewers around the globe watched in amazement as the Apollo XI landed on the moon, and Neil Armstrong took the first human steps on its lunar surface.⁷⁷ Whereas prior to televised coverage, Americans would consume current affairs through still photographs (as in *Life* magazine) and the non-visual mode of radio broadcast, television brought sound and images together, presenting information in a visual and audio stream that seemed closer to lived experience, despite the fact that it was, in reality, simply another medium for conveying edited content. Winogrand knew this from his own experience as a freelance photojournalist and magazine photographer, and by 1969 he set out specifically to photograph the media's effect on the way current affairs were reported.

The most influential, and at times confounding, voice to emerge on the topic of television and media during this period was the Canadian scholar Marshall McLuhan, who is credited by many as being the first figure to articulate a concept of "the media" itself.⁷⁸ McLuhan's two most

⁷⁷ Briggs and Burke, 204.

⁷⁸ Lance Strate and Edward Wachtel, introduction to *The Legacy of McLuhan* (Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 2005), 2. Other significant studies on television as an extension of mass media and communications began to emerge in the late 1950s. Scholars of this nascent field, often hailing from more traditional academic disciplines such as English Literature or History, saw the importance of tracing a history of the media within the emerging field of cultural studies. British scholar Raymond Williams wrote from a Marxist perspective in his books *Communications* (1962) and *The Long Revolution* (1961). This latter publication traced the history of media from the Industrial Revolution to the present, whereas Daniel J. Boorstin's *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America* (1961), as mentioned previously in this chapter, focused on the mechanisms through which events were increasingly becoming manufactured for media consumption from an American perspective. Other early, significant publications included

relevant publications in the early 1960s were *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (1962) and *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (1964).⁷⁹ The former explored the ways in which communication technologies, from the beginnings of oral culture, through the invention of the alphabet and the advent of moveable type, to the explosion of printed media and the beginning of the electronic age, affected human cognitive functions. McLuhan expanded on this idea in *Understanding Media*, his most influential work, wherein he coined the famous phrase “the medium is the message,” suggesting that it was less the content of a given media that influenced society and culture, but rather its inherent characteristics which had the ability to shape human cognition, global communication patterns, and hence entire social systems. “The message of any medium or technology is the change of scale or pace or pattern that it introduces into human affairs,” wrote McLuhan.⁸⁰ He also asserted that new technologies, like television, would naturally extend “the aspiration of our time for wholeness, empathy, and depth of awareness,” such that “three thousand years” of specialization and alienation would dramatically reverse as electronic communications replaced mechanical industry. “The globe,” he wrote, would become “no more than a village.”⁸¹

McLuhan took great care to avoid making overt value judgments about new media in his analysis, which distinguished him from his contemporaries. As one example, McLuhan took Boorstin to task for failing to move beyond his disdain for images that supplanted lived

I. Bogart’s *The Age of Television* (1951), one of the first books to refer to the media’s dominance; J. J. Klapper’s *The Effects of Mass Communication* (1960), and H. J. Skornia, *Television and Society: An Inquest an Agenda for Improvement* (1965).

⁷⁹ Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962) and *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964).

⁸⁰ McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 8.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 5.

experience, rather than reflecting on the nature of the images themselves, and their effect on human behavior.⁸² McLuhan's refusal to critique or overtly praise a medium like television, and instead probe the nature of the medium itself and how it affected human beings and social systems, contributed to a great many (mis)interpretations of his work. His original theories also resulted in a surge of media attention centered on McLuhan himself. Numerous articles and interviews appeared in the years immediately following the publication of *Understanding Media*, promoting McLuhan, who until then was little known outside of Canadian academic circles, to a wider public.⁸³ The contemporary art world also took note: the artist Nam Jun Paik featured McLuhan's twisted visage in his 1968 piece titled *McLuhan Caged (Electronic Media II)*, for which he distorted TV images of his subject by moving a magnet across the cathode ray tube [fig. 1.3]. McLuhan's avoidance of either championing or condemning the mass media in his theoretical construct aligns directly with the documentary-style rhetoric of Garry Winogrand, which likewise avoided assigning moral meanings to photographs. McLuhan emphasized the need to understand how television affected the nature and scale of human behavior, while Winogrand pictured these effects as they were manifesting in the staged political and social events of the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Winogrand's photograph of a women's liberation march in New York City in 1971 echoes McLuhan's notion that the presence of the media informs human behavior [fig. 1.4]. The

⁸² McLuhan specifically commented on Boorstin's analysis of travel photographs, which, Boorstin argued, were "diluted, contrived and prefabricated." McLuhan wrote: "He is not concerned to find out why the photographs have done this to us." McLuhan, 198.

⁸³ As Lance Strate and Edward Wachtel note in their introduction to *The Legacy of McLuhan*, the coverage was immense: in the year 1966 alone, articles appeared in *Fortune*, *Newsweek*, *Life*, *Esquire*, *Time*, *the National Review*, *partisan Review*, *Look*, *The New Yorker*, *The Nation*, *The Saturday Review*, *The New York Times Magazine*, *Encounter*, *Family Circle*, *Vogue*, and *Mademoiselle*—among others. See Strate and Wachtel, eds., *The Legacy of McLuhan* (Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, Inc., 2005). In his profile on McLuhan for the *New York Herald Tribune* in November 1965, Tom Wolfe asked, rhetorically: "Suppose he is what he sounds like, the most important thinker since Newton, Darwin, Freud, Einstein, and Pavlov?" Tom Wolfe, "What if He is Right?," *New York Herald Tribune*, November 21, 1965, 6.

frame is almost completely packed with a crowd of men and women. A few figures in this throng of people hold aloft hand-made political posters, while in the foreground right corner, a woman wearing a women's liberation t-shirt speaks into a microphone held by a male reporter. Her hands are open in a gesture meant, ostensibly, to add emphasis to her words, while the reporter, mouth pursed, seems to be talking simultaneously. At the far left of the image, the telephoto lens of a camera extends into the picture, though no trace of its human operator is shown. The compressed visual dynamism of the scene, the focused emphasis on the body language and facial expressions of the man and woman in the right corner, and the obvious presence of a reporter and photographer on the scene, all suggest that the human behaviors on display at this demonstration were necessarily effected by the presence of the media: an image which resonates visually with McLuhan's theory that "the medium is the message."

The seeds of Winogrand's interest in photographing the effects of the media can be seen as early as 1960, when he made a picture of John F. Kennedy addressing the Democratic National Convention and included a television set broadcasting Kennedy's speech [fig. 1.5]. In this image, Kennedy is shown from behind, his right hand raised, as he addresses a largely unseen audience from behind a large microphone and podium. His figure is crisply outlined by a bright artificial studio light, and he appears in relatively sharp focus, while the background of the photograph is rendered with far less definition. The only human figure that can be discerned appears to be another photographer, holding a camera to his face and looking back at Kennedy. Between Kennedy and the viewer (behind Kennedy's back but in front of Kennedy from the viewer's perspective) is the small television set. On the screen, the viewer sees Kennedy's face and hand, aligned in such a manner to indicate that the viewer is seeing, simultaneously, the "real" Kennedy and his televised image. In depicting this double representation in his

photographs, Winogrand emphasizes the differences between the two experiences. The viewer, because she is not able to see Kennedy's visage, begins to focus more on the picture's most prominent element, the neatly televised face of Kennedy, shown on the TV set against a plain grey backdrop that lacks any distracting features. It is in the televised image that the strength and charisma of Kennedy comes through, whereas the elements that surround Kennedy in the Convention's setting render him far less imposing as a figure. Winogrand's photograph demonstrates how the media supported and extended Kennedy's symbolic reach across the country in his bid for a presidential endorsement.

Kennedy, of course, was known for his telegenic presence: a factor which has been credited as helping him to win a key presidential debate in 1960 against Republican candidate Richard Nixon and, ultimately, the presidency of the United States. This event was the nation's first televised presidential debate. Throughout the course of the discussion, Kennedy, a handsome young senator from Massachusetts, appeared far more calm and collected than his older vice presidential challenger, who seemed sickly and nervous in front of the TV cameras. Though Americans who listened to the debates on the radio believed, by and large, that Nixon had won, those who watched the debate on television felt that Kennedy was the clear winner. This televised event marked a watershed moment in the history of politics, wherein the effects of the media fundamentally altered the behavior and strategy of political candidates campaigning for election. After the 1960 Nixon-Kennedy debate, appearance, charisma and demeanor—one's "image," as Boorstin might have termed it—came to mean as much, if not more than, intellect and experience in the public eye.⁸⁴

Part III: Winogrand's *Public Relations* and Lee Friedlander's *The Little Screens*

⁸⁴ For a brief retrospective synopsis of the significance of the Nixon-Kennedy debate, see Kayla Webley, "How the Nixon-Kennedy Debate Changed the World," *Time*, September 23, 2010. Available online at: <http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,2021078,00.html>. Viewed July 21, 2013.

At approximately the same time that Winogrand made his photograph of Kennedy speaking at the Democratic National Convention in 1960, Lee Friedlander began a series of photographs that featured television sets illuminated in domestic and motel interiors, and identified only by geographic location and date. *The Little Screens*, as the series is called, are almost all devoid of people (with the exception of an occasional self-portrait). The photographs thus offer a visually subdued counterpoint to Winogrand's *Public Relations*, which teem with the physical energies of human gesture and expression.

A brief discussion of Friedlander's work, and select comparisons between photographs in *The Little Screens* and Winogrand's *Public Relations* place these two bodies of work within the same cultural milieu as the theories of Boorstin and McLuhan. These two series collectively suggest the way that television, as both a physical apparatus and as a mass media tool, reconfigured the social landscape of the 1960s and early 1970s by introducing and exacerbating a mediated experience of public life in the private sphere. As implied by images from *Public Relations* and *The Little Screens*, albeit in different ways, TV and the media destabilized the boundaries between the public experience of events deemed newsworthy and their private consumption through the transcription of a televised broadcast. The photographs also suggest the ways in which socially constructed ideals of femininity, masculinity, and family, as seen in televised entertainment, might influence one's self-presentation, behavior, and appearance in "real" life, particularly when the individual knows that s/he will be photographed or televised. As such, notions of illusion and "reality," fantasy and lived experience became blurred, evoking, at times, a sense of pervasive anxiety and ironic absurdity..

Friedlander's *The Little Screens* depict an oddball array of faces and figure fragments that loom from their TV sets like alien presences. These images illuminate the intimate spaces in

which they are situated. Glamorous female faces and bodies, a disembodied eye, a crying infant, a pistol-wielding fist and an FBI fugitive all appear on the TV screens [figs. 1.6, 1.7, 1.8, 1.15, 1.16, 1.19]. Like Robert Frank before him, whose image of a television set in a roadside café was included in *The Americans* [fig. 1.9], Friedlander recognized the ubiquity of TV sets as material features of the American postwar landscape: as noted earlier in this chapter, by 1960, ninety percent of American households had at least one receiver, and watched an average of five hours of television per day.⁸⁵

Friedlander's *The Little Screens* were first published in a small portfolio of six images in *Harper's Bazaar* in 1963. Walker Evans wrote a brief accompanying essay, describing the images as "deft, witty spanking little emblems of hate."⁸⁶ Evans suggested that the juxtaposition between the televised spectral presences and the absence of "real" people in Friedlander's photographs hinted at an alienation of humanity from lived experience, or what Evans described as an "atmosphere of eclipse." Evans also wrote that the "careful, good-looking women" afloat in Friedlander's decontextualized TV images "might be categorically unsettling marriage and the home and total daintiness," alluding, perhaps, to a growing uneasiness with the nuclear family ideal promoted in the 1950s.⁸⁷ These sentiments were likely more indicative of Evans's intellectual disdain for television's increasing prominence in the postwar period than any conscious effort on Friedlander's part to cast a caustic eye on the medium. Indeed, Friedlander's own take on the subject is characteristically difficult to situate. Evans nonetheless offers credible insight into *The Little Screens*, wherein an underlying sense of anxiety pervades the scenes to

⁸⁵ Spigel, 1.

⁸⁶ Evans, essay for "The Little Screens," 129.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 129.

evoke the psychological and emotional effects of dislocated desire that televised images can induce. Such sensibilities are particularly prevalent in those photographs by Friedlander that feature TV sets displaying the faces and figures of what Evans describes as the “careful, good-looking” women.

Two such photographs by Friedlander depict what appears to be the same televised woman, a buxom blond dressed in a turtleneck leotard and lying on the floor, exercising. Interestingly, the titles for these pictures indicate that they were taken on separate occasions, and in separate geographic locations: *Atlanta*, 1962 [fig. 1.10] and *Nashville*, 1963 [fig. 1.11]. In both instances, the woman is shown in awkward postures that are both humorous and sexually suggestive, and the television set is shown off to one side, juxtaposed with either a large, centrally placed empty leather chair and ashtray [fig. 1.10], or the reflection in a door mirror of an unmade, twin bed [fig. 1.11]. The palpable absence of a physical human (and presumably male) presence is heightened tremendously through these juxtapositions, particularly in the *Atlanta* picture, wherein rumpled sheets on a single bed might imply a recent departure.

These images resonate with Evans’s assertion that the televisual presence of disembodied, attractive women in empty domestic and motel interiors imply an unsettling rupture of the hegemonic ideal of the white, middle-class, nuclear suburban family that was so readily promoted and consumed in the visual culture of the 1950s. There are, in fact, no images in *The Little Screens* that depict a couple or a family. Friedlander’s photographs were distinctly different from the kinds of imagery often seen in popular photojournalism that reinforced the cultural imperative prominent during the 1950s that white, middle-class women should marry, refrain from pursuing a career, and serve as a mother and housewife while men were expected to serve as the family’s primary breadwinner.

Such an idea is exemplified in a photograph taken by *Life* staff photographer Francis Miller in 1951 [fig. 1.12], which accompanied an article about television in that magazine. Miller's photograph includes ten schoolchildren (and one dog) gathered around, and seemingly riveted by, a television set, while a young, attractive, and well-kempt woman—presumably a mother and housewife—looks on from the doorway as she towels off a plate. The image reinforces the gendered positioning of women as homemakers and primary guardians of children in the home, and television's centrality within that domestic space.⁸⁸ There is a distinct sense of order to the scene, with its well-groomed, well-behaved children, neatly seated in front of the television, overseen by the woman of the house, who appears to go about her housework dutifully and cheerfully. The image is neither ambiguous, nor provocative; it is meant to illustrate an article, and uphold certain prevalent notions of domestic order in 1951.

In contrast, an image by Friedlander which could allude to the anxiety underscoring the nuclear family ideal strikes a deliberately ambiguous tone. This image features the face of a young child on a TV screen [fig. 1.7], though its presence in a sparsely furnished, yet claustrophobic bedroom space seems more unsettling than endearing. The TV set is placed on a small table at the foot of a bed, which is centered between two darkened doorways. Significantly, it is from the bed's vantage point that Friedlander took the picture and thus situates the viewer, such that the child's spectral presence hovers just beyond the perimeters of the bed's slatted footboard. Friedlander has compressed the pictorial space by manipulating depth of field, such that there appears to be no room to maneuver between the bed and the TV set. The bed's footboard thus begins to evoke the edge of a giant crib, transforming the adult bed—a site for

⁸⁸ Depictions of television consumption in popular magazines were often divided along gender lines, with male viewers shown in a state of repose, while female viewers were frequently depicted—as seen in this image—as productive workers and consumers. See Spigel's chapter "Women's Work," in *Make Room for TV*, 73-98.

both romantic intimacy and the procreative act—into a space of confinement. Given the minimal formal organization of elements in the scene, and Friedlander’s adept manipulation of the compositional space, the viewer makes immediate correlations between the child’s ghostly face and the sterility and containment of the bed. On the one hand, the child, relegated to a separate and virtual realm, suggests a frustration of the imperative that the 1950s nuclear family ideal implied: sexual intercourse performed as part of the filial (and by extension, national) duty of that union to produce children. On the other hand, the child’s presence could also seem like a form of surveillance, such that it keeps watch over adult sexual behavior. The child in Friedlander’s photograph could thus be interpreted in two distinct ways: as a taunting presence—a looming reminder of familial lack—and as a new form of invasive species, forever keeping tabs on the private realm of adults.

The upsetting of a nuclear family ideal that was predicated on heterosexual coupling and harmonious relations between men and women thus may be read into the unpeopled interiors in several of Friedlander’s *The Little Screens*. A related, though decidedly more raucous depiction of heated male-female relations as they occurred on the streets of New York appears in Winogrand’s photograph of the women’s liberation march discussed earlier in this chapter [fig. 1.4]. In Winogrand’s image, there is direct confrontation between the male reporter and the female demonstrator, both of whom appear to be speaking simultaneously, though not necessarily to one another (the woman does not look directly at the man as she talks). The setting is outdoors, amidst throngs of people on city streets, which served as sites for political protest. The woman in this image is not seen wearing a tight-fitting leotard, or with finely-coiffed hair and make-up, nor is she assuming a sexualized posture as the women in Friedlander’s TV sets do. Rather, she is wearing a t-shirt and is shown responding directly and emphatically to the

media. Though the tensions between this woman and the reporter are evident through their intense body language and facial expressions, they do not inhabit separate spheres: both are part of the urban matrix, and both participate in the making of a media event. In Friedlander's photographs, by contrast, the women who appear are mediated presences: they are not "real," but rather illusory and fleeting, their images plucked from the media stream by the photographer's camera. Perhaps Friedlander's images, made at the start of "the long sixties" and at about the same time that Betty Friedan published *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), could thus be seen as offering a prescient glimpse into the emptiness and sterility of the private, domestic sphere and the gendered expectations that often accompanied it. Such limitations were particularly felt by upper and middle-class white women like Friedan, who had moved from urban locales to live in suburbia, but found the lifestyle stifling and fought to expand possibilities for women's social roles by taking direct political action (see Chapter Two for more on this topic). Considered collectively, then, Winogrand's *Public Relations* and Friedlander's *The Little Screens* picture a moment in history when television was one of the primary vehicles for perpetuating fantasies, illusions and "the feminine mystique," while also playing a key role in spreading news and awareness about public protests aimed at dismantling those same conceptions.

The dual capacity of television to perpetuate cultural norms and stereotypes, while also providing a vehicle through which to challenge such precepts, was fundamental to its ability to reconfigure—and confuse—human interactions during the post-World War II period. Television created a sense of false intimacy between the private domestic sphere and public engagement. As such, the medium became a central feature of "the rise of mediated publicness," a condition in

which the understanding of real life events is affected by TV imagery as much as human imperatives influenced televised content.⁸⁹

This mediated human condition—wherein a person’s sense of self is caught between public and private, illusion and reality—is an undercurrent in both Winogrand’s and Friedlander’s images. It can be seen, for example, in the way a certain kind of constructed femininity recurs throughout both bodies of work. In one photograph from *Public Relations* by Winogrand, a well-coiffed blond woman, dressed in an evening gown and long white gloves, descends a staircase at the opening night of the Metropolitan Opera House at Lincoln Center in New York City [fig. 1.13]. She appears spotlit, with a dazed look and a plastic smile, and is seemingly disengaged from the man who stands right in front of her, holding a light meter in an effort (one presumes) to take an exposure reading off of her dress. Here, Winogrand maintains enough physical distance from the woman, who carries herself with a sense that she will be photographed, in order to include the man who will ostensibly take her picture. As with most of his *Public Relations* images, Winogrand pictures the manifestation of “mediated publicness,” seen here in the manner of dress and behavior of this female subject, as well as the reaction of the man preparing to take her photograph.

This woman’s radiant public image appears to be a constructed femininity of the kind found regularly in pictures of glamorized female beauty that were seen in media advertisements during the 1950s and 1960s. Such images featured idealized female faces elevated to spectacular heights, as in a 1953 advertisement for Emerson TV, wherein the face and head of a smiling

⁸⁹ Tim O’Sullivan, “Researching the Viewing Culture: Television and the Home, 1946-1960,” in Helen Wheatley, Ed., *Re-Viewing Television History: Critical Issues in Television Historiography* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris), 159-160.

woman on TV is compared to the grandeur of a cinematic movie still [fig. 1.14].⁹⁰ These idealized tropes of femininity are also in play in Friedlander's series, seen in the visages of the women who populate several of *The Little Screens* [figs. 1.15, 1.16, 1.17, 1.19]. These women appear in their mediated screen format as cool and aloof, with flawless skin, hair, and make-up, completely unconnected to the mundane settings in which the TV sets themselves are located. This same disengagement from one's surroundings is suggested in Winogrand's photograph.

The rise of "mediated publicness," and the lack of clearly defined barriers between illusion and reality that television and the media facilitated, caused considerable anxiety during this period. As Lynn Spigel notes in her study of the cultural discourse surrounding television in the post-World War II era, particularly in women's magazines, there were many fears and concerns associated with television and its effects on the changing nature of public and private life. These concerns were reflected both in the popular critique of television, and in the content of popular television programs. Spigel identifies America's taste for science fiction shows during the 1960s, for example, with the broader cultural anxieties associated with the Space Race, the New Frontier, and the social isolation resulting from "white flight" to the suburbs. As Jeffrey Sconce outlines in his book *Haunted Media*, there were also aspects of TV technology, wherein the electrical disembodiment and disassociation of images (as visual signifiers) through television broadcasts created a sense of the "uncanny," a Freudian term which described the feeling of being familiar with a subject, while simultaneously feeling uneasy, and even fearful,

⁹⁰ It is also relevant to consider Friedlander's *The Little Screens* as personal responses to the nuclear family ideal promoted so vigorously in visual culture of the 1950s that he did not actually experience himself. Friedlander's mother died when he was six years old, prompting a move to live with another family for seven years, during which time he visit his father on holidays and during the summers. Though it was not necessarily an unhappy childhood, it certainly was not conventional by 1950s idealized standards.

about that same subject as foreign to one's experience and understanding.⁹¹ This dissonance lent itself readily to associations with the paranormal, life in outer space, and fantastical realms. As Sconce argues, the "uncanny" underscored the popularity of TV shows such as *The Twilight Zone* (1959-1964), *The Outer Limits* (1963-1965), *My Favorite Martian* (1963-1966), *Bewitched* (1964-1972), and *I Dream of Jeannie* (1965-1970) during the 1960s. These programs, with their allusions to otherworldly media-controlling forces, utopian futures, and fantastic escapes from suburban domesticity, were seen as a cultural response to a series of disappointments and fears in American life, including the homogenizing conformities of suburban living, and worries about American technological superiority in the wake of Russia's *Sputnik* mission of 1957, which resulted in the world's first successful man-made, earth-orbiting satellite.⁹²

Several photographs in Friedlander's *The Little Screens* include TV images that recall motifs associated with these television programs. The isolated TV-set eye that appears in one photograph resembles the disembodied eyeball that floats in the opening credits to *The Twilight Zone*⁹³ [fig. 1.6]. In another image, a perky female face seems to have fused with the physical apparatus of the television set, such that the entire TV becomes a quirky, alien-like head, complete with antennae akin to those worn by Uncle Martin in *My Favorite Martian* [figs. 1.17, 1.18]. In another image, the coal-rimmed eyes and nose of one close-up female face recalls both the intro cartoon credits and other moments in *I Dream of Jeannie* when Barbara Eden's character, after having misbehaved by using her supernatural powers in some fashion, has been

⁹¹ For a historicized definition of "the uncanny" as Freud first discussed it in his 1919 essay, see Bill Brown, "Reification, Reanimation and the American Uncanny," *Critical Inquiry* 32:2 (Winter 2006), 197-199.

⁹² Jeffrey Sconce, *Haunted Media: Electronic Presence from Telegraphy to Television (Console-ing Passions)* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), 138.

⁹³ For opening credits to *The Twilight Zone*, go to <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NzIG28B-R8Y&feature=related>. Viewed August 4, 2013.

sent back into the genie lamp as temporary punishment by her astronaut “master”/husband (a premise that itself reinforced oppressive stereotypes of gender roles for women and men)⁹⁴ [fig. 1.19].

Though Friedlander himself would not have made such associations between the imagery in his *The Little Screens* and the broader cultural context of popular television shows at the time, the prevalence of such disembodied pictorial fragments, as they appear within the physical apparatus of the television set, provided the photographer with subject matter that resonated with his own personal sense of the humorous, confusing, and ironic absurdity of the American social landscape during the 1960s. Though in reality the images would have been fleeting in a television broadcast, Friedlander makes them permanent fixtures in the interiors’ décor through his still photographs. These pictorial fragments thus assume a far more looming and significant presence in Friedlander’s carefully composed photographs than they might if encountered in real life.

Another prevalent fear regarding television had to do with the possible effects its content might have on influencing violent or “delinquent” behavior, particularly amongst children and adolescents. During the 1950s, numerous Senate hearings were convened to study the possible correlations between televised violence and actual crime.⁹⁵ It was determined that between 1954 and 1961, violence on television had steadily increased. As the tumultuous events of the 1960s unfolded, including the assassinations of JFK, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Robert Kennedy, these concerns only escalated. In 1964 testimony by New York Senator Kenneth Keating, citing

⁹⁴ For opening credits to *I Dream of Jeannie*, go to: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bNg-xClEnqM>. Viewed August 4, 2013.

⁹⁵ See Nancy Signorielli, *Violence in The Media: A Reference Handbook* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2005), 5-7.

FBI director J. Edgar Hoover, indicated that the increase in crime and juvenile delinquency throughout the U.S. was a direct result of violence in the mass media.⁹⁶

Two photographs by Friedlander and Winogrand align with these pervasive concerns. The first, Friedlander's picture, is titled *New York State*, 1965. It is atypical for *The Little Screens* in that it is the only image to include human presences (other than a self-portrait) [fig. 1.8]. The TV viewers appear to be children (perhaps one of Friedlander's own), though the details of their figures are murky. Friedlander exposed the photograph such that the interior is decidedly darker than usual: the viewer sees a pair of legs belonging to one figure, and the back of a small child (as well as a portion of a dog in the middle of the floor). Clearly visible, however, is the image of a gun-toting hand, illuminated on the TV screen. The gun points to the right of the picture's frame and as conceived in Friedlander's photograph, it appears as though it is aimed at the window immediately adjacent to the TV set and thus, by extension, at the world outside this domestic interior. Friedlander's photograph might thus be seen as alluding to the broader cultural dialogue concerning the correlation between onscreen violence consumed in the safety of a home and the real-world turmoil beyond its threshold.

Winogrand's image, made five years after Friedlander's picture, depicts a group of young men and women gathered for a Kent State Demonstration in Washington, D. C. in 1970 [fig. 1.20]. The shocking violence of the Kent State massacre, in which members of the Ohio National Guard shot and killed four unarmed college students who were protesting the Vietnam War (while wounding nine others) incited enormous public outrage and massive student demonstrations on college campuses and in the nation's capital (as seen in Winogrand's picture). In his photograph, Winogrand includes several demonstrators, two of whom wear gas masks. One of the masked figures holds a film camera directly up to his protective eye covering, making

⁹⁶ Ibid., 77.

it appear as though the entire device is conjoined with his body. Just above his head, an enormous cylindrical sound boom, divorced from any signs of its human operator, extends into the picture plane from the right edge of the composition. On one level, Winogrand's scene provides a factual description of the young protesters, outfitted with protective gear, and an array of media recording devices. On another, more symbolic level, the picture suggests an uneasy fusion of man and machine, such that they appear in some instances to have become interpenetrable.

Winogrand's image, considered in tandem with Friedlander's photograph of the disembodied gun-toting hand on TV, speaks to the reciprocal relationship among the media, the reality of violence, and the human responses such anxieties incite: reactions that manifest as fear and anger. As suggested by presence of the young camera operator wearing a gas mask in Winogrand's picture, such reactions are met with an escalation of preventive and protective measures that appear both absurd and frightening in of themselves.

Another prevalent, more sinister perception about the mass media during this period had to do with the notion that the media might serve as a tool of oppression and mind control. Two photographs by Winogrand and Friedlander could be read in this context. The first photograph, by Winogrand, depicts a group of men gathered together for a demonstration outside Madison Square Garden, in New York in 1968 [fig. 1.21]. Six men are prominently visible, with shadowy hints of other figures in the darkened background. All of the men are wearing eyeglasses (though one African American man in the background is wearing sunglasses), and all of them are turned away from the picture plane, with the exception of one curly-haired man with broken glasses and blood streaming down his face in the foreground. He returns Winogrand's gaze. The image of this man, who also seems to be restrained by a figure behind him, is deeply unsettling. It is

reminiscent of the iconic film still of a nurse with broken glasses and bloodied face from Sergei Eisenstein's revolutionary propaganda film *Battleship Potemkin* (1925) [fig. 1.22]. Though Winogrand's photograph serves no propagandistic purpose, as Eisenstein's film was perceived to do, the visible signs of violence evoke a visceral, emotional response from viewers.

Significantly, the man's vision is seemingly impaired both by the broken eyeglass lens and the blinding camera flash that obscures the remaining lens over his other eye. He appears much like the proverbial deer in the headlights, stunned and momentarily immobilized by both the physical restraint of the figure behind him, and by the camera's function itself. The men around him, however, appear not to notice or not to care. Winogrand's characteristic penchant for creating ironic juxtapositions—in this image, between the perceived indifference of these men and the physical shock of the victim—is here given a darker undercurrent; one that suggests, through the symbolic obstruction of the bloodied man's human vision, as well as the “blind eyes” of the men who surround him, an inability or perhaps a refusal to see clearly the world around them.

Disembodied vision is given a different symbolic presence in Lee Friedlander's photograph of TV set featuring a single human eyeball (discussed previously) that seems to stare back at the viewer across a middle-class living room interior [fig. 1.6]. Here, human vision is less obscured than it is displaced, or perhaps reconfigured as an omnipotent, all-seeing eye that stares directly back at the viewer. Given the nature of photography, which arrests a moment in time, the implication of this open eyeball is that it can never be closed: it will always, in Friedlander's image, be watching us.

The implications of controlled media surveillance of the American citizenry were certainly considered to be a danger inherent in the mass media after World War II. George

Orwell penned his famous dystopian novel *1984* in the year 1949, amidst growing fears about totalitarian regimes and government surveillance in the immediate aftermath of World War II and during the early years of the Cold War. In this novel, Orwell coined the phrase “Newspeak,” to describe a government-imposed means of simplified communication, aimed at limiting dissent, free thought, and individuality. In Orwellian terms, then, government surveillance and “Newspeak” were tools of oppression, reliant on the mechanisms of mass media to maintain order and locate dissenters. Such metaphors for controlling society through the mass media, while by no means definitive interpretations, are nonetheless evoked in Friedlander’s photograph.

Conclusion

Our fears and anxieties over the influence of television and the mass media have only intensified in the four to five decades that have interceded between the creation of the photographs in *Public Relations* and *The Little Screens* and our own time. Television has expanded its viewing options exponentially since the 1960s and early 1970s, and its content now derives from national broadcasts, cable and satellite networks. While TV remains a viable source and conduit for news and information, our current anxieties—about control, privacy, the appropriateness of content for family viewing and the effects of long-term use on human behavior—are today more focused on internet communications and social media networks. Reconsidering the significance of Winogrand’s *Public Relations* as artistic commentary during a period of particularly heated dialogue about the “effect of the media on events” thus offers insight into a transformative moment in the history of mass media and its impact on human relations. As I have endeavored to show in this chapter, the themes and subjects that comprise Winogrand’s *Public Relations*, particularly when discussed in tandem with Friedlander’s *The*

Little Screens, become more relevant to our contemporary historical moment when considered more fully within the context of their own.

Chapter Two: Rethinking Winogrand's Women

In 1969, Garry Winogrand took a photograph at the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Centennial Ball [fig. 2.1]. It depicts a tightly packed crowd of men and women. At the center of the composition is a young brunette woman with long hair, wearing a white dress with a neckline that plunges to the navel, barely covering her breasts. Fully accessorized with baubles, beads, and a large feather boa, she raises a glass and smiles dazedly beyond the picture. In the foreground, a more conservatively dressed man in a bow tie looks back towards the woman. Between them stands another male figure, his back to the camera.

The success of Winogrand's image owes something to the photographer's editorial eye. In comparing this published image with a close variant, it is abundantly clear that the variant [fig. 2.2] lacks the palpable energy of the published image, where the woman's attire seems to have exploded, with no apparent self-consciousness on her part. Indeed, the woman in Winogrand's picture is literally bursting out of her clothing, but in a larger sense, she is also bursting from the confines of the more conventional social decorum of a previous generation. Whereas ten years prior, Winogrand might only have discovered a public spectacle of this sort in a burlesque theater, by 1969 he encountered it in one of New York's premiere cultural institutions. The cleavage Winogrand shows here thus goes well beyond the woman's extreme décolletage. Metaphorically, it points to a particular historical moment in which the social mores and gendered behavioral strictures of one generation have split apart, exposing, in full public view, the fleshly female self-expression of sexuality as well as its uncertain public reception. Ultimately, in this picture, Winogrand records the very act of looking at female subjects, such that voyeurism itself also becomes the subject.

In another image, made a few years later, Winogrand photographed a group of women marching for reproductive rights on the streets of Manhattan [fig. 2.3]. It appears to have been taken in the middle of the street, with Winogrand standing just ahead of the marching women. The women stride confidently forward, carrying posters bearing slogans such as “Stop the world we want to get on,” and “If men could get pregnant abortion would be a sacrament.” The women are young, smiling, often braless, and their body language suggests strength and self-assurance. Compositionally, these women are clearly the main focus of Winogrand’s attention, though he maintains enough distance to record the crowd of onlookers.⁹⁷ Here, the streets of Manhattan are a site for political action and protest, a setting as crucial to the picture as the women themselves.

Both of these photographs were featured in the 1975 publication *Women are Beautiful*, a small format book featuring eighty-four black-and-white photographs taken by Winogrand between 1963 and 1975. As suggested by these two photographs, *Women are Beautiful* touched on a variety of issues of the time, sparking questions regarding the way women appeared in public or semi-public spaces, the manner in which Winogrand pictured them, and the way our understanding of the pictures has shifted according to historical contexts and the various critical lenses that have framed their interpretation.

The aim of this chapter is to reconsider select photographs by Garry Winogrand from *Women are Beautiful* within the broader context of a particularly heated socio-political landscape: the women’s liberation movement and sexual revolution of the late 1960s and early 1970s. The first section of this essay will detail the somewhat tumultuous evolution of the book’s

⁹⁷ Though no specific date is given, this event may have been the second annual march commemorating the anniversary of Women’s suffrage on August 26, 1971, an event that drew 6,000 protesters and comprised a day of “guerilla actions” by women against various institutions, including the American Stock Exchange, the Internal Revenue Service, the First National City Bank, and St. Patrick’s Cathedral. See Grace Lichtenstein, “6,000 March on Fifth Avenue to Protest Sex Bias, *New York Times*, August 27, 1971.

production, as well as early critical responses to the photographs themselves. This information will provide insight into both Winogrand's original intentions for promoting the work as well as the conflicting critical responses that characterized the book's initial reception, which differed from posthumous discussions of the work (Winogrand died in 1984) that tended to be dismissive. The second section of this essay will provide context within Winogrand's oeuvre for *Women are Beautiful* by considering a selection of his images of women that pre-date that publication. Winogrand made these early pictures during the late 1950s and early 1960s at a time when he was making personal work while working as a freelance magazine photographer. This latter experience, as I will argue, prompted Winogrand to recognize the impact that postwar advertising and the mass media had on women's material consumption and self-presentation on the streets of Manhattan. The female subjects who appear in *Women are Beautiful* are, by and large, part of the generation who rejected the fashions and material consumption of middle and upper-middle-class women during the previous decade. These generational differences are reflected in the way women presented themselves, as seen in Winogrand's pictures. Additionally, these social shifts coincided with a change in Winogrand's personal artistic practice in the early 1960s, which also affected the way women were represented in *Women are Beautiful*.

Finally, the third section of this essay details how certain ideological currents within the sexual revolution and women's liberation helped increase women's sexual self-confidence during this period. These factors also shaped the way female subjects appear in Winogrand's pictures. Considering this context opens the possibility for reassessing Winogrand's female subjects as having, in certain instances, agency over self-presentation. Significantly, these same transformations disrupted traditional definitions of voyeurism, wherein the activity of "girl watching," which implied the act of men furtively looking at a passive female subject, was made

overt and challenged by women. In several of Winogrand's photographs, women are seen returning the photographer's gaze, which subverts the notion that these subjects were completely unaware that they were being looked at and photographed. Further, as suggested in my description of the photograph at the start of this chapter, Winogrand's photographs of women were not simply "evidence" of the photographer's voyeuristic tendencies. Rather, many of these pictures presented a more complex scene wherein men and women are shown looking at one another in a nexus of intersecting gazes, such that voyeurism itself becomes an integral aspect of the subject matter.

Reconsidering Winogrand's *Women are Beautiful* photographs using these critical lenses complicates the manner in which these images have routinely been dismissed in the scholarship as an embarrassment within the photographer's career, or as the ill-conceived result of the photographer's impaired critical faculties when photographing female subjects. By emphasizing the potential agency of Winogrand's female subjects as determined by the viewer, a perspective that is lacking in previous assessments of Winogrand's photographs of women, this discussion aims to bring renewed appreciation to the work.

Part I: The Making of *Women are Beautiful*

Women Are Beautiful was published by Light Gallery in 1975. In addition to the eighty-four black-and-white photographs by Winogrand, the book included an introductory essay titled "First Person, Feminine" by the little-known writer Helen Gary Bishop and a very brief text by Winogrand about why he likes to photograph women. Winogrand's images feature young, conventionally attractive women on city streets and in public spaces. In many pictures, it appears that these women were unaware they were being photographed. In other photographs, the female subjects directly return the photographer's gaze.

For Light Gallery, which was founded in November of 1971 and a relatively young establishment by 1975, publishing photography books was a new venture.⁹⁸ The decision to pursue a book of Winogrand's work came at a time when few such publications were being produced, and at a point in Winogrand's career when he had already gained significant recognition, largely through the support of John Szarkowski, the Museum of Modern Art's highly influential curator of photography. As Szarkowski had conveyed to Light Gallery's director and founder Tennyson Schad, there was "no young photographer 'more interesting, valuable or important' than Garry Winogrand."⁹⁹

Women are Beautiful was conceived in the midst of the women's liberation movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s. During this period, feminists—a diverse and often divided group—hotly debated the issue of objectifying women in magazines, the media, and in everyday interactions with men. Indeed, the notion of publishing a book of images of attractive women by a photographer who jokingly referred to himself as a "male chauvinist pig" had all the potential for stirring up controversy. In fact, both Winogrand and Schad hoped for such a reaction: the timing of the book's publication was unquestionably opportunistic.

Both Winogrand and Schad believed the book had the potential to be "a significant moneymaker."¹⁰⁰ From Schad's perspective, the photographer was a proven talent. Winogrand,

⁹⁸ Light Gallery stipulated that they exhibit and publish recent work by the photographs they represented, which is one reason the photographs in *Women are Beautiful* were recent pictures, and did not include Winogrand's earlier photographs of women.

⁹⁹ Tennyson Schad, Memorandum to File, February 13, 1974 Light Gallery Archives, Center for Creative Photography, The University of Arizona, AG194, Box 34. By 1975, Winogrand had won the second of three Guggenheim Fellowships, had a book of his work published (*The Animals*, 1969), and had his work shown in five exhibitions at MoMA, including *New Documents* (1967), an important show that also featured works by Diane Arbus and Lee Friedlander. Winogrand's work was also included in the exhibition *Towards a Social Landscape* (1966), another important exhibition organized by Nathan Lyons at the George Eastman House in Rochester, New York.

¹⁰⁰ Tennyson Schad to Garry Winogrand, June 27, 1974. Light Gallery Archives, Center for Creative Photography, The University of Arizona, AG194, Box 34.

who had, by his own admission, been compulsively photographing women since the mid-1950s, was eager to seize an opportunity to publish a relatively recent selection of these pictures and gain notoriety, both critically and commercially, for the subject matter. The era's contentious atmosphere seemed ripe for the appearance of Winogrand's book, and in June 1973, Schad and Winogrand struck a verbal agreement to proceed. Winogrand delivered the initial selection of prints in October of that year.

Getting *Women are Beautiful* published took time, however, due to heated disagreements between Schad and Winogrand regarding virtually every aspect of production. First, there were questions about the title. Winogrand originally proposed "Women are Beautiful: Confessions of a Male Chauvinist Pig," no doubt an effort to anticipate and provoke feminist criticism.¹⁰¹ The latter portion was finally dropped at the recommendation of Bishop, who found Winogrand's original title unwarranted upon viewing his images. Second, there were concerns over the essayists. Schad initially asked Szarkowski to write the book's introduction, but scheduling conflicts prohibited his direct participation. Szarkowski nonetheless had strong opinions about the book's production, and suggested someone "outside photography," such as the novelist, essayist, and playwright Joan Didion, would be a good choice.

After Szarkowski declined, Winogrand stated that he wanted a "feminist" to write the main catalogue essay. Schad told him that "made sense only if counter-weighted by a male writer who would make a dialogue."¹⁰² Winogrand's first choice was writer Erica Jong, whose bestselling, highly controversial novel *Fear of Flying* (1971) had brought her enormous fame. In

¹⁰¹ In the Garry Winogrand Archives at the Center for Creative Photography, the legal contract between Winogrand and Tennyson Schad notes that the provisional title of the book was: "Women are Beautiful: The Observations of a Male Chauvinist Pig." This title changed by the time of publication. Garry Winogrand Archive, Center for Creative Photography, The University of Arizona, AG 72:1.

¹⁰² Ibid.

Winogrand's mind, Jong had the kind of widespread name recognition that would help sell *Women are Beautiful*. When that possibility did not pan out, various other names were mentioned, as per Schad's memos, including: Betty Friedan, Kate Millet, Gloria Steinem, Tom Wolfe, Terry Southern, John Updike, Jimmy Breslin, George Plimpton, and Philip Roth. None of these culturally prominent prospects were interested or available. Ultimately, Helen Gary Bishop, who was recommended by literary agent Nat Sobel as "a fine writer with a feminist outlook,"¹⁰³ was given a contract. Bishop's literary credentials at the time were rather slim compared to the more notable figures Schad and Winogrand initially considered. She had written an unpublished article about the controversial film *The Last Tango in Paris* and was working on a piece for *Oui* magazine when she was approached. Nonetheless, according to literary agent Nat Sobel, she had "very good insight into Garry's photographs."¹⁰⁴ Ultimately, however, Bishop's essay for the book failed to convince potential distributors.¹⁰⁵

Perhaps the biggest point of contention between Schad and Winogrand had to do with maintaining creative control. After striking the verbal agreement with Winogrand, Schad spent the remainder of 1973 and the first few months of 1974 communicating with a variety of potential publishers, literary agents, and distributors. One early conversation involved Larry Schiller, a "fast-talking" photojournalist, editor, publisher, and movie producer, who was in the

¹⁰³ Schad, Memorandum to File, January 27, 1975. Light Gallery Archives, Center for Creative Photography, The University of Arizona, AG194, Box 34. Bishop, whose own writing celebrated female sexuality and who was sympathetic to Winogrand's work, was considered a smart choice to preempt criticisms of the work on the grounds that it sexually objectified women.

¹⁰⁴ Schad, Memorandum to File, January 27, 1975; February 3, 1975. Light Gallery Archives, Center for Creative Photography, The University of Arizona, AG194, Box 34.

¹⁰⁵ According to Schad, David Godine was approached with the possibility of distributing the book. Godine refused, noting that he "did not like Helen Bishop's essay, [and] he did not trust Winogrand." Schad, Memorandum to File, April 8, 1975. Light Gallery Archives, Center for Creative Photography, The University of Arizona, AG194, Box 34.

process of publishing W. Eugene Smith's *Minimata* as a book.¹⁰⁶ Schiller eventually dropped out of the negotiations, but Schad and Winogrand continued to debate the relative merits of potential authors and the degree of their contribution.

Amidst this more civil dialogue, Winogrand grew increasingly impatient with Schad. "In cold fury," he penned a particularly pointed letter to Schad in March of 1974, threatening to "take the book from you and seek another publisher" if he did not receive a contract by the end of the month.¹⁰⁷ Schad waited a few days to "regain his composure" before responding to Winogrand. Schad explained the professional necessities of dealing with various stakeholders, telling Winogrand that he "was not willing to pour my investment down a rathole," and that he had "made a substantial commitment to you in terms of money and time and I expect to live up to it."¹⁰⁸ Winogrand was not placated, however, and at "11:10 am on June 13, 1974," the photographer picked up the photographs he had left with Schad, refusing to return them until a printing date had been set.¹⁰⁹ This act infuriated Schad, who entreated Winogrand to return the photographs.

Schad and Winogrand finally struck a deal with Nat Sobel in September of 1974. They agreed that Light Gallery would independently publish the book while Sobel pursued distributors. Eventually, Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux agreed to co-publish the book, and Winogrand himself agreed to write a second, very brief introduction articulating, as best he

¹⁰⁶ Schiller also recommended a format wherein a significant essay by a major literary or cultural figure, such as Steinem, Wolfe, or Southern, would accompany the work.

¹⁰⁷ Garry Winogrand to Tennyson Schad, March 11, 1974. Garry Winogrand Archives, Correspondence, ca. 1940-1984, Center for Creative Photography, The University of Arizona, AG 72:1.

¹⁰⁸ Tennyson Schad to Garry Winogrand, April 1, 1974. Garry Winogrand Archives, Correspondence, ca. 1940-1984, Center for Creative Photography, The University of Arizona, AG 72:1.

¹⁰⁹ Tennyson Schad, Memorandum to File, June 25, 1974. Light Gallery Archives, Center for Creative Photography, The University of Arizona, AG194, Box 34.

could, the reasons he photographed attractive women, apparently ignoring Szarkowski's earlier advice to Schad that "an introduction dealing with Garry's work simply as an expression of man's view of woman is totally absurd. One must get into the work physically."¹¹⁰

The book finally appeared in print in 1975, using Winogrand's final edit, which differed from the selection made by Szarkowski and Winogrand's close friend, the photographer Lee Friedlander, in the early stages of the book's production. Paul McDonough, a fellow street photographer who was also Winogrand's friend, designed the book, using on the cover Winogrand's photograph of an attractive, well-dressed brunette woman holding an ice cream cone, her head thrown back in laughter [fig. 2.4]. The press release pitched the book as "an eloquently erotic statement: from one of America's foremost photographers."¹¹¹

Ultimately, the book was not a commercial success despite Schad's myriad efforts to find a lucrative distribution deal. The reasons are not entirely clear, though one might surmise, given divided opinions about the book in both its development stages and in subsequent reviews, that the work simply failed to incite the kind of controversy for which Schad and Winogrand had hoped. Critically, the book was also deemed a failure, though early reviews were more mixed than dismissive. There was certainly no consensus regarding the work's broader significance within either Winogrand's oeuvre or as commentary on the state of male-female relations.

The published reviews were mostly written by male critics whose own perspectives on the work varied widely. One writer noted that Winogrand's images of women were too "romantic" in their conception, and determined that they were not titillating enough for certain

¹¹⁰ Upon reading Winogrand's text in the book, it becomes readily apparent that Szarkowski's advice was ignored. See Tennyson Schad, Memorandum to File, February 13, 1974. Light Gallery Archives, Center for Creative Photography, The University of Arizona, AG194, Box 34. My thanks to Harold Jones for generously passing along this information.

¹¹¹ Press release for Garry Winogrand, *Women are Beautiful* from Farrar, Straus and Giroux, Inc. Garry Winogrand Archives, Center for Creative Photography at The University of Arizona, AG 72:1

heterosexual male viewers. “Not recommended for cynics or confirmed lechers,” he wrote, asserting that such viewers would likely find the content “redundant and boring.”¹¹² Another critic emphasized the female subjects’ awareness that they were being photographed. He noted that because many of the women acknowledged Winogrand’s presence by looking directly at the photographer, the viewer could detect “the glowing hint of pleasure” at being looked at. This exchange was integral to the process of “making beautiful” the women he looked at, even if, in this writer’s opinion, the female subjects were not otherwise attractive.¹¹³ Gene Thornton, writing in the *New York Times*, was simply confused by Winogrand’s photographs. For him the female subjects were neither the idealized visions of commercial beauty nor “the beautiful heroines of consciousness raising.” On the one hand, he felt Winogrand’s women were “young and nubile and usually bursting out of their clothes...just the sort of girls a construction worker would whistle at,” and on the other hand, they were individuals, “charming, exasperating, attractive, repulsive, irreplaceable individuals...remote from the dream and ideal of the glamour photographer.” Though Thornton’s review hinted at the diverse range of female representation in Winogrand’s photographs, the critic was unable to articulate the significance of that complexity.¹¹⁴

Linda Kerr, writing for the *Austin American Statesman*, was one of the few female writers to review Winogrand’s book. She was unique in going beyond simply categorizing female types. Instead, she emphasized the importance of the city as a setting for these photographs: “the city is, in fact, as central to the book as the women themselves, for one feels

¹¹² “Rose-Tinted Lens,” review of *Women are Beautiful* in *Afterimage* (February 23, 1976), 13.

¹¹³ Phil Patton, *Artforum* (February 1976), 65-66.

¹¹⁴ Gene Thornton, “The Quintessential Street Photographer,” *New York Times*, December 7, 1975.

that it is mainly in the streets and parks of large cities that Winogrand encounters the kaleidoscopic ‘press of the crowd’ which is visually exciting to him as a photographer.”¹¹⁵ Kerr’s observation seems to have gone largely unnoticed, though her basic argument will be taken up later in my discussion of the historicized significance of “the city streets” for many women during this period.

Excluding Kerr’s review, these early, contemporaneous reviews of *Women are Beautiful* reflect a wide range of reactions that hinged on the degree to which the women in Winogrand’s photographs were seen to be “beautiful,” and the extent to which that designation relied on the acknowledgment of the female subjects that they were being photographed (an important distinction that I will elaborate upon in the second part of this chapter). Posthumous criticism, however, was much more pointedly dismissive. The most influential voice was that of Szarkowski, who was less interested in the question of the female subjects’ possible agency than he was in the photographs’ formal inconsistencies. Szarkowski critiqued *Women are Beautiful* in his 1988 monograph *Winogrand: Figments of the Real World* by summarizing: “In general, women disliked the book and men were mystified by it.”¹¹⁶ He deemed the publication Winogrand’s “weakest [book], flawed by permissive editing (his own),” that resulted in an “uneven” selection of images that rendered the book “shapeless as a whole.”¹¹⁷ Though Szarkowski’s comments may have been rooted in his own lack of involvement in the project, his words nonetheless reflect an enduring perception of Winogrand’s “women” pictures: that their final resolution as pictorial form was only occasionally successful, and that, more often than not,

¹¹⁵ Linda Kerr, “Show World,” [review of *Women are Beautiful*], *Austin-American Statesman*, February 8, 1976. Typewritten copy in Garry Winogrand Archives, Center for creative Photography at The University of Arizona, AG 72:1.

¹¹⁶ John Szarkowski, *Winogrand: Figments from the Real World* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1988), 20.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 20-21.

Winogrand's compulsive and indiscriminate desire to look at women derailed his ability to achieve the kind of kinetic coalescence of form and content for which he is recognized.¹¹⁸ Despite the fact that many early reviews were in actuality more laudatory, it is Szarkowski's characterization that has endured in subsequent critical discourse on *Women are Beautiful* and Winogrand's photographs of women in general.

By the 1990s, there arose another kind of criticism of Winogrand's photographs of women, based on his "voyeuristic" tendencies.¹¹⁹ By this time, postmodern criticism, with its focus on issues of gender, male voyeurism and female objectification, had begun to dominate academic and critical discourse about art and photography more generally. These critics employed strategies from poststructuralist literary criticism and film theory in their analyses as a means to challenge a particular strain of modernist formalism that Szarkowski himself espoused.¹²⁰ The "male gaze" gained wide academic currency after such publications as John

¹¹⁸ Szarkowski perpetuated the idea that women impaired Winogrand's critical faculties, noting in his essay for *Winogrand* (1988) that although women were an important categorical subject within Winogrand's oeuvre (resulting in a few great pictures), their repeated appearance in his contact sheets and prints indicated an unhealthy compulsion. He felt that Winogrand's ideas about women—what they were and what they symbolized—were "outrageous, or perhaps saved from outrageousness by...simplicity and openness, and by...reckless enthusiasm," and that Winogrand's preoccupation with photographing them "recurred like malaria throughout his life, possibly as an index of his loneliness, and of his inability to escape or to satisfy a lust that seemed not, in the contemporary mode, the desire for rollicking, trouble-free sex life, but some more atavistic need, in which women represented neither pleasure nor companionship, but magic power." Tod Papageorge also supported this idea, noting that Winogrand's desire to photograph women during the early 1960s was a kind of personal compulsion, and that the unusually high proliferation of these photographs was "an open, repetitive description of his confinement." See Szarkowski, *Winogrand*, 20 and Tod Papageorge, *Garry Winogrand: Public Relations* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1977), 12.

¹¹⁹ Contemporaneous criticism of the work, as suggested in the opening paragraphs of this essay, was far from virulent. The lack of such criticism at the time *Women are Beautiful* was published therefore suggests that negative conceptions of the work based on its "voyeuristic" tendencies coalesced several years later, perhaps after 1981, when Robert Freidus Gallery published the photographs in a fine print portfolio, or after *Figments* was published and the work exhibited.

¹²⁰ For a selection of this kind of criticism, see Richard Bolton, ed., *Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989).

Berger's *Ways of Seeing* (1972) and Laura Mulvey's essay, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," the latter of which first appeared in the academic journal, *Screen*.¹²¹

This kind of ideological current shaped Arthur C. Danto's assessment of Winogrand's photographs of women in 1996. Danto interpreted Winogrand's images as indicative of a behavior that was "extremely aggressive towards the women for whom [he] hungers." As an example of Winogrand's "extreme aggressiveness" Danto cites the fact that Winogrand tilts his camera "in such a way that it is impossible to suppress the thought that the camera offered Winogrand a way of looking down bosoms. The women, taken unawares, have unprotected breasts. They have not had time to cross their arms." Extreme in his interpretation—which may be debated as being problematic on a number of levels—Danto's view differs significantly from earlier critics in his reliance on gender politics as its primary ideological impetus.¹²²

In summary, then, Winogrand's photographs of women—as defined more or less exclusively by the eighty-four images contained in *Women are Beautiful*—have, since the time of their making, been dismissed in basically two different ways: as the unfortunate byproducts of a photographer whose formal and critical faculties were severely compromised by attractive

¹²¹ Berger's *Ways of Seeing* was first broadcast as a four-part series on the BBC in 1972. The scripts for these broadcasts, which challenged established aesthetic conventions of Western culture, were later adapted for the publication. Mulvey's essay borrowed certain ideas from Lacanian psychoanalysis to problematize the act of looking and the social mechanisms through which it operates as being historically aligned with male power and privilege. Mulvey's ideological model became a cornerstone of subsequent gaze-theory, even as her own biases (the presumption of a heterosexual male viewer and a monolithic conception of female viewership) came under heavy criticism for their failure to more broadly consider the various possible subjectivities of the viewer. Mulvey's essay, which originally appeared in the academic journal *Screen*, was reprinted in Laura Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 14-26.

¹²² Arthur C. Danto, *Playing with the Edge: The Photographic Achievement of Robert Mapplethorpe* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 27. Danto's assessment makes little sense on a number of levels. Foremost, the photographs are never taken at a close enough proximity to be "looking down" any of his subjects' "bosoms," and several of the women in *Women are Beautiful* make eye contact and even smile at the photographer. Thus, the notion that these subjects were all unaware they were being photographed is incorrect. Second, Winogrand's propensity for titling the camera is also evident in many of his images that do not include women. And finally, Danto presumes that women would instinctively want to cover their breasts if they were aware they were being photographed, which is rife with its own gendered assumptions about the way women "should" normally behave with their bodies in public spaces.

female subjects (Szarkowski's main argument); and as examples of unbridled and problematic, one-sided heterosexual male voyeurism. Unfortunately, this critical dichotomy has eclipsed a deeper consideration of the socio-political context in which the images were made, and how these historical circumstances shaped the degree of agency that some of these female subjects appear to have had over their bodily self-presentation on the streets of Manhattan. This bifurcated opinion about Winogrand's photographs of women also avoids complicating the definition of voyeurism to consider alternatives beyond the one-sided act of men looking at women who are passively unaware that they are being looked at. Such definitions of voyeurism must be reconsidered, I would argue, when Winogrand's female subjects are represented as actively returning the photographer's gaze.

It is because of this canonical and critical bias that I have chosen to discuss at length the production of *Women are Beautiful*, and the context in which that book appeared, as these factors have not been discussed at length by Winogrand scholars. This socio-political climate absolutely shaped both the selection of images and the decision to produce a book of pictures of attractive women by a male photographer in an effort to generate buzz and, ultimately, sales (though as stated earlier, the book proved to be a commercial flop).

Assigning agency to Winogrand's female subjects is admittedly complicated, however, and requires some explication. The manner in which Winogrand worked—rapidly raising his hand-held 35 mm Leica to snap a picture without asking his subjects' permission—precludes any convincing argument that these women had much advance knowledge of their picture being taken by Winogrand. They almost certainly had no control over which images he ultimately printed and included in *Women are Beautiful*. And yet many of the women in Winogrand's pictures are by no means passively disengaged from the photographic act: as stated previously,

several female subjects return Winogrand's gaze, and a few are even seen to be smiling [figs. 2.11-2.12]. Further, the strength and self-confidence many women convey in these images through facial expressions and body language is palpable, as noted by some of the book's early critical assessments.

Therefore, assessing the potential agency of Winogrand's female subjects with respect to their self-presentation, as I argue throughout the essay, derives primarily from the viewer's perceptions of the work and a historicized understanding of the women in these photographs. Historian Cornelia H. Butler considers the possibility for such alternate interpretations of Winogrand's images in her brief catalogue essay titled "Remains of the Day: Documentary Photography at the Turn of the Century," as she asks: "Is any kind of feminist reading of these pictures possible?"¹²³ This is an interesting question. Looking back at Winogrand's photographs of women today, it is virtually impossible to ignore the radical changes in gender roles, sexual mores, and public behavior that occurred in the late 1960s and early 1970s. As is evident in his correspondence with Tennyson Schad throughout the course of planning the publication of *Women are Beautiful*, Winogrand was fully aware of the heated social and political zeitgeist, and attempted to capitalize on it for his own gain, albeit without financial or critical success. With respect to the production of these images, however, Winogrand's intentions are far from clear, especially to the photographer himself. Winogrand was no feminist; nor was he by any means a misogynist. In his own words, Winogrand loved women and the particular energies he felt they conveyed: "It's not just prettiness of physical dimensions," he wrote in the introduction to *Women are Beautiful*. "I suspect that I respond to their energies, how they stand and move their

¹²³ Cornelia H. Butler, "Remains of the Day: Documentary Photography at the Turn of the Century," in Max Kozloff et al, *The Social Scene: The Ralph M. Parsons Foundation Collection of Photography at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles* (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2000), 154.

bodies and faces.”¹²⁴ Winogrand unquestionably had an erotic interest in women as subjects, and *Women are Beautiful* was marketed as such. Yet he was also perplexed by his own inability to “get it straight” when it came to picturing them. A photographer who fervently believed that “a photograph doesn’t tell you anything...it is the illusion of literal description,” Winogrand could not reconcile his desires with his rhetoric. Thus, any facile attempt to define the photographer as either a lover of women or a “male chauvinist pig” is ultimately a fruitless venture. The more interesting question, then, is perhaps not simply whether a feminist reading of these images is possible, but rather how the historical circumstances of the women’s liberation movement and sexual revolution might be woven into a new understanding of these photographs from a viewer’s perspective. As a street photographer, photographing women in Manhattan during this period, Winogrand made pictures that suggest something of the dynamic, chaotic, liberating, and unsettling realities that both he and his subjects encountered daily on the streets of New York City. This setting invariably affected interactions between men and women. Furthermore, Winogrand’s astute awareness of the print and mass media, and its role in shaping public preconceptions of women as well as their own self-perceptions, factors into a historicized appreciation of the female subjects in Winogrand’s pictures. It is therefore useful to consider a selection of images of women Winogrand made prior to those that were included in *Women are Beautiful*, to help establish how radically women’s self-presentation—and the class aspirations implied through fashion and demeanor—changed between the late 1950s - early 1960s and the latter part of that decade.

Part II: Winogrand and Women, Illusions and Fantasies 1954-1963

¹²⁴ Winogrand, “Winogrand on Women,” *Women are Beautiful*, 10.

As discussed in Chapter One, by 1963, Winogrand had come to the realization that the media had exacerbated self-deception on a massive social scale, to the point that people no longer knew who they were or what they were looking for in life: “We have lost ourselves...and it just doesn’t matter, we have not loved life.”¹²⁵ Though Winogrand’s statement was not specifically aimed at his depictions of women, his words are relevant when applied to a consideration of several of his early pictures of female subjects.

Winogrand began taking pictures of women in his capacity as a commercial freelance photographer as well as for his personal work (which he always considered his more important endeavor) around 1954.¹²⁶ The photographer studied briefly with Alexey Brodovitch at The New School for Social Research, and by 1952 he had begun freelancing, working for a short time as a stringer for the Pix Photo Agency, then, for Henrietta Brackman Associates beginning in 1954. By the mid-1950s, Winogrand’s images began appearing in a number of periodicals, including *Sports Illustrated* and *Collier’s*, *Pageant*, *Harper’s Bazaar* and *Redbook*.

Most of Winogrand’s commercial work during this time lacks the heightened degree of visual energy and stylistic distinction of his personal work.¹²⁷ One reason for this lack of spontaneity had to do with the fact that Winogrand was often (though not always) working in more controlled and staged settings, and often indoors. The content was also tailored to meet the

¹²⁵ Reprinted in Wilner Stack, *Winogrand 1964*, 13. Trudy Wilner Stack’s monograph, in which she highlights the cultural and political importance of the year 1964 and the personal significance it had for Winogrand’s career, was the first significant book on the photographer to present a different curatorial perspective than that of Szarkowski and Papageorge.

¹²⁶ This distinction between commercial and personal work is often blurry in Winogrand’s early career. As a freelance photographer, Winogrand made pictures to build his existing portfolio. Many of these photographs were thus produced without a clear assignment, though with the hope that the pictures would be sold to a picture agency or magazine.

¹²⁷ John Szarkowski characterized Winogrand’s early commercial images as working “the same shallow veins of human interest and social uplift that his colleagues worked, and much of the time he made pictures not clearly distinguishable from those of other photographers of his generation.” Szarkowski, *Winogrand*, 17.

demands of the magazines. As Winogrand's commercial contact sheets suggest, the photographer shot features that conformed to the socially prescribed gender roles and nuclear family ideals that sold magazines in the 1950s. Several stories Winogrand shot under the auspices of Pix and Brackman Associates focus on family stories, children, or "romance," all subjects of particular interest to women. In some instances, he used his first wife, Adrienne Lubow, as a model¹²⁸ [fig. 2.5]. The fact that Winogrand was making pictures to sell to magazines that often found their way into middle-class homes and were heavily reliant on female consumers is itself significant. His experience suggests Winogrand knew the kinds of gender roles and "women's stories" that sold magazines.

Where Winogrand's commercial photographs fed the magazines that many middle-class white women consumed, the photographer's personal work suggests a meta-awareness of the correlation between media illusions and the way such images affected women's self-presentation on the streets of New York. In general, the kinds of women that Winogrand most often photographed during this early period were young, attractive, white (though not always), and fashionably dressed. These women were well aware of their public images. Their comportment and attire suggested a heightened degree of class-consciousness. They dressed for public display in Manhattan, New York's wealthiest borough, while likely consuming (or aspiring to consume) the fashionable attire on display in the city's famous luxury department stores: Sak's Fifth Avenue, Bergdorf Goodman, and Barney's, among others.

The streets of Manhattan were public venues for the display and advertising of material goods and the latest fashions, of which women were seen to be the primary consumers.

According to Charles Abrams (who was a city planning expert and former New York State

¹²⁸ Such stories included features titled "Back to Campus: Hunter College," "The Fight," "Children in the Water," and "Minnesota Farm Family."

government official), women were “a vital component” in the city’s social and economic well-being. They were “walking museums of fashion,” on the city streets, and “the main buyers of goods and the supports of the downtown,” and a demographic of integral importance to the health of American cities.¹²⁹ The city streets on which Winogrand photographed, then, were not simply generic public spaces. Nor were they, as suggested in more conventional definitions of street photography, “street theatres” from which Winogrand, the artist-photographer, snapped moments from time to create a unique, dynamic composition, divorced from socio-economic reality.¹³⁰ They were engendered spaces, shaped by socio-economic imperatives and class distinctions.¹³¹ The “gendering” of the city streets in Manhattan was thus directly correlated with the rhetoric of postwar materialism, as implied in Abrams’s text.

¹²⁹ Charles Abrams, *The City is the Frontier* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1965), 337.

¹³⁰ In more canonical conceptions of street photography the city street is generically defined as being part and parcel of a perpetually thrilling and chaotic urban theatre. According to this model, it is open and available to all, a public place to “see and be seen,” ripe for the plucking by photographers who, like Winogrand, were able to picture dynamic subjects or ironic formal juxtapositions that might otherwise go unnoticed. These “decisive moments,” to borrow Henri Cartier-Bresson’s influential terminology, become photographs that are then seen and interpreted as existing largely outside of the historical specificities shaping the subject matter itself. One historical survey of the genre, *Bystander: A History of Street Photography* by Colin Westerbeck and Joel Meyerowitz, takes this ideological approach to defining street photography, specifically citing Winogrand’s working methods. In conversation with Meyerowitz, Westerbeck states: “Winogrand seemed to be happiest when he confronted a wall of humanity surging down the street. He threw himself into it.” To which Meyerowitz, who often accompanied Winogrand when he went out to photograph on the streets of New York, responds: “Yes!...*On the street each successive wave brings a whole new cast of characters. You feel the power of the sea. You take wave after wave, you bathe in it. There is something exciting about being in the crowd, in all that chance and change—it’s tough out there—but if you can keep paying attention something will reveal itself.*” In this conception, Winogrand is hailed as the “quintessential street photographer” that Szarkowski defined, a model that Westerbeck and Meyerowitz unquestionably uphold. The city streets here are almost mythic in stature, a space in which an imposing “wall of humanity” ebbs and flows with a seemingly uncontrollable force, like “wave after wave” of the sea. Winogrand thrives on this pulsing energy, holding his camera poised so as to always be ready for the next great moment to “reveal itself” to his highly attuned sensibilities. Though this more poetic description is no doubt true to the experience and excitement of being a street photographer, it falls short in its capacities for engaging with the realities of either the subjects or the specifics of their setting. In fact, it deems these aspects to be more or less irrelevant. See Colin Westerbeck and Joel Meyerowitz, *Bystander: A History of Street Photography* (Boston, New York and London: Bulfinch Press, 1994).

¹³¹ As Marsha Meskimmon argues in her book, *Engendering the City: Women Artists and Urban Space*: “space is neither empty of cultural forms...nor is it a gender-neutral stage on which people act...Understanding space as engendered is crucial also to the feminist project of rethinking gender difference. It runs counter to the dominant tradition...derived from physics and geography, which describes space as stable and neutral.” See Meskimmon, *Engendering the City: Women Artists and Urban Space* (London: Scarlet Press, 1997), 1-2.

Winogrand's photographs make manifest a correlation between women of a certain class and the act of material consumption. In several images, women who fit easily into a "museum of fashion," wear the mink stoles, white gloves, buttoned and belted blouses, distinctive hats, matching purses and shoes that were fashionable during the mid to late 1950s and early 1960s [figs. 2.6-2.8].¹³² In one image from this period, Winogrand appears to be directly observing the absorption of advertising and visual culture by real women [fig. 2.9]. Here, the photographer shows two young women standing on a city sidewalk, looking at a copy of *Glamour* magazine. They are framed as the central figures in the composition: one holds the magazine while her counterpart leans in over her shoulder. Both of the women are neatly coiffed and well dressed, and appear to peruse the magazine's pages with rapt attention. This overt juxtaposition—between the "glamorous" women on the pages of the magazine and the self-consciously styled women who visually consume those ideas and images—suggests a recognition on Winogrand's part regarding the influence popular women's magazines like *Glamour* had on determining appearance, and women's desire to attain a particular kind of femininity characterized in magazines.

In another photograph from ca. 1960, Winogrand highlights the ubiquity of advertising aimed at women in the city's postwar social landscape, and its power to persuade. Here, he pictures an elegant blond woman standing in the doorway of a store [fig. 2.10]. Her hair is tied back and she is dressed in a long coat, her arms clasped around a package and her hands clutching her purse. To her right is an advertisement in the store's window, depicting a small illustrated figure who looks remarkably like the woman herself: blond, dressed in a suit, and advertising "Ladies Suits and Coats." On the one hand, this interplay of forms is a witty

¹³² Kenneth Silver acknowledges the historical specificities of fashion and dress as being relevant to Winogrand's street photographs, in his article "The Witness," *Art in America* (October 1988), 148-157.

arrangement. However, by juxtaposing the real and the ideal, the female consumer with the advertisement for that which is to be consumed, Winogrand's image may also be read as a more distanced observation of the power that illusion and fantasy wield over the woman's self-presentation.

Women's magazines, as an influential component of the mass media that specifically targeted a female demographic, were identified by Betty Friedan in her publication *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) as being the prime perpetrators of oppressive, socially-sanctioned expectations for women's appearance, behavior, and lifestyle choices. She noted that by around 1949, magazines which had in the years prior to World War II celebrated The New Woman and featured "heroines" who pursued careers, began to more regularly run stories and features that glorified a very different ideal of domestic femininity as epitomized in the roles of housewife and mother. "The feminine mystique," Friedan wrote, "encourages women to ignore the question of their identity" by accepting society's dictum to find fulfillment through marriage and childrearing. As a means to divert attention from this important self-questioning, Friedan argued, advertisers sell a "public image" to women, through commercials selling everything from "washing machines, cake mixes...rejuvenating face creams [and] hair tints."¹³³ The power of this "public image," as purveyed in million-dollar advertising campaigns in magazines and television, relied on the fact that "American women no longer know who they are." Rather than looking to their own mothers as a source of inspiration, these women, according to Friedan, "look to this glossy public image to decide every detail of their lives."¹³⁴

¹³³ Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1963), 64.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 65

In his experience as a freelance photographer, making commercial pictures for such publications as *Redbook* and *Harper's Bazaar* during the 1950s and early 1960s, Winogrand himself produced “glossy public images” that white middle-class women in particular consumed. His personal work, however, suggests a broader and more distanced perspective, one that implies the photographer's awareness of the correlation between self-image, class, and consumer culture identified by Friedan. His visual cognizance correlates not only with Friedan's argument (albeit, significantly, without feminist concerns), but also with earlier sociological theories that appeared during the first few years of the postwar period, such as David Reisman's influential book *The Lonely Crowd*, published in 1950. In this book, Reisman outlined a radical shift in the collective character of middle-class American society, from a more tradition-based generation who looked to emulate their parents' lifestyles and belief systems, to an “other-directed” society whose decisions on what to consume, how to spend leisure time, and with whom to spend it were increasingly influenced by television, the media, and peers. This characterization of the American middle-class, which coalesced in the immediate postwar period and prevailed throughout the 1950s as television came to be a regular feature in middle-class American households, emphasized the pursuit of status and peer approval over the cultivation of self-awareness, such that people were increasingly incapable of “knowing” themselves.¹³⁵ The “power of the public image” to influence women's self-definition that Friedan and Reisman articulate resonates as well with Daniel J. Boorstin's views, who argued in his 1961 book *The Image* that “the illusions that flood our experience” were the direct result of Americans' extravagant expectations and the “thicket of unreality” created through news and entertainment vehicles (Boorstin's views are discussed in Chapter One).

¹³⁵ David Reisman, *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1950).

Given his rhetorical position on the nature of photography's inability to say anything beyond the picture's frame, Winogrand himself would never have drawn a parallel between these images and the larger social context that Friedan discussed in *The Feminine Mystique*. However, the subjects of the two pictures previously discussed [figs. 2.9 and 2.10] call to mind Friedan's correlation between American women and material consumption in the postwar period.

Winogrand certainly came to a similar conclusion about American society more broadly by the time Friedan's book was published. Thus, reading these early images within the context of Winogrand's own growing personal dissatisfaction with the world of advertising and his place within it is, I would argue, relevant and integral to a broader consideration of his later photographs of women, as seen in *Women are Beautiful*.

There are also aesthetic differences between Winogrand's earlier images of women and those that appear in *Women are Beautiful* that factor into this discussion. In the early 1960s, Winogrand started to experiment with a wide-angle lens and tilted perspective.¹³⁶ A comparison between a pre-1963 image [fig. 2.11] and one that was made in 1968 from *Women are Beautiful* highlights this distinction [fig. 2.12]. In the earlier image, a young blond woman, her hair meticulously curled and styled, is seen in close proximity, from her knees up, walking along a sidewalk in front of a store window with a display of female mannequins. Winogrand made this shot standing just to her left. She wears a form-fitting suit with a fur-trimmed collar, carries a

¹³⁶ Around 1959-60, Winogrand began to experiment with a wide-angle lens and titled perspective, to explore how these technical shifts might open up new possibilities for picturing the physical energies he encountered on the city streets. Winogrand became interested in these formal strategies, which he had seen in some of Robert Frank's pictures, having discovered *The Americans* around 1959. Winogrand used the wide-angle lens in an unconventional manner, however. Rather than reserving it, as did most photographers, for those situations wherein recording the full scope of a subject was not possible from a particular vantage point, Winogrand used it from a more intimate distance on the street. This allowed him to order to record more of a figure, though with an unsettling, vertiginous quality that is quite different from the usual perspective. This way of working also meant that Winogrand rarely held his camera level, but rather aimed it at the middle of a figure. Winogrand's use of the wide-angle lens skewed the architectural verticals and horizontals that emphatically define the gridded streets of Manhattan. To subvert the overly "gimmicky" effects associated with the wide-angle lens, Winogrand often chose to keep the verticals straight but to tilt the horizontals, such that his subjects appear slightly off-kilter.

small purse in one hand and holds a small striped bag in her arm at a sharp right angle across her chest. Her body language seems almost self-protective, as she looks directly and sternly into the camera.

In the later photograph, however, the dynamic between photographer and subject is quite different. Here, Winogrand appears to be standing in front of his main subject, who also confronts the camera by looking directly at Winogrand (without smiling) as he snaps her picture. She is dressed in jeans, a t-shirt, and a bandana scarf covers her hair. Her arms are not crossed over her body, but rather hang by her sides as she strides forward with her shoulders back. She does not carry a package or purse, but rather a mesh bag hangs over one shoulder and she holds large handbag in her other hand. Shot from her feet up, and at a tilted angle, the woman appears slightly off-kilter, an effect that is intensified by the strong recessionary diagonals of the architecture and automobiles which frame the image. The sidewalk and the man behind her recede into the visual space of the photograph, such that she takes more of a central, commanding position within the composition. These formal elements, combined with the woman's stern expression and her active return of the photographer's gaze, gives the entire photograph a kinetic and confrontational feel. It also imparts a degree of agency to the female subject: she does not cower from view, nor "protect" herself from being seen, but rather appears to assert herself in the space, through confident body language and visual engagement with Winogrand.

Significantly, the city street is also represented differently in these two images. In the earlier photograph, the street is a site not only for visual display, but also for material consumption. This woman, holding a neatly wrapped package that implies she has been shopping, is seen standing in front of a store window display that includes an array of female

mannequins modeling women's fashions. In the later image, the woman is seen in the middle of the sidewalk, with no store windows in sight. The contents of her bags are more ambiguous. The city street here evokes something different, a certain dynamism and energetic assertion of selfhood, on the part of the woman and, I might argue, on the part of Winogrand himself. For Winogrand always felt that the streets of Manhattan were an extension of his personal space, and—especially in his early years—an escape from the working-class Jewish home in the Bronx in which he was brought up.¹³⁷ Manhattan offered the photographer different possibilities, and functioned as a nexus of constant energies, both positive and negative. For Winogrand, as Trudy Wilner Stack notes, “‘The City’” provided “high rolling, wild action” into which he could easily tap with own restless energy. It was this same energy that Linda Kerr recognized and wrote about in her review of *Women are Beautiful*: “the city is, in fact, as central to the book as the women themselves, for one feels that it is mainly in the streets and parks of large cities that Winogrand encounters the kaleidoscopic ‘press of the crowd’ which is visually exciting to him as a photographer.”¹³⁸

After 1963, Winogrand's photographs changed. This shift was a result of several factors, both personal and societal. As he gained more confidence in his own abilities to discover new understandings about an increasingly chaotic world through the photographic process itself, he began to move away from freelancing to define himself through personal work (with the significant institutional and personal support of John Szarkowski and MoMA). At approximately the same moment, he experienced the dissolution of his own first marriage, and a coming-to-terms with the same fears that pervaded American society at the start of the 1960s: the

¹³⁷ As Trudy Wilner Stack notes: “Manhattan was less neighborhood, less ghetto, [than the Bronx] as replete with converging possibilities as any place he might search for.” Wilner Stack, *Winogrand 1964*, 272.

¹³⁸ Kerr, 2.

perpetuation of the nuclear arms race, radical political changes that upset the status quo, and the escalation of America's involvement in Vietnam. Though women continued to trigger Winogrand's photographic interest, the way they appeared in his pictures changed significantly.

Part III: Women's Liberation, the Sexual Revolution, and the Rise of Mediated Voyeurism, 1963-1975

What, exactly, had changed for women on the streets and in the public spaces of Manhattan during the 1960s? A brief summary of the key moments in the women's liberation movement and sexual revolution helps demonstrate the radical ways in which social mores and political laws governing women's behavior and legal rights had shifted during this decade. These transformations inform the way women appear in Winogrand's *Women are Beautiful* photographs.

By the late 1960s, emerging from the achievements of the civil rights and anti-war movements, and influenced by the sexual revolution of that decade, the modern women's movement had taken shape. Several key events had occurred. In 1960, Enovid was approved by the Food and Drug Administration as the first commercially available oral contraceptive, giving women the freedom to engage in sex without the risk of pregnancy.¹³⁹ Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, as referenced earlier, provided the first trenchant feminist critique of limited societal expectations for women living a postwar American "ideal," and identified a "nameless, aching dissatisfaction" that many white middle-class American wives suffered when they gave

¹³⁹ As Gail Collins notes in her recent book on the modern women's liberation movement, in 1960 there were still thirty states that restricted the sale or advertising of the pill, in addition to other forms of birth control. Middle-class married women could still largely go to their doctors for a prescription, though poorer or unmarried women were less fortunate. See Gail Collins, *When Everything Changed: the Amazing Journey of American Women from 1960 to the Present* (New York: Little Brown, 2009), 160.

themselves over (often unwittingly) to “the mystique of feminine fulfillment.”¹⁴⁰ One year later, in 1964, the category of sex was added to Title VII of the Civil Rights Act making it illegal for an employer to discriminate on that basis (as well as race, color, religion, and national origin).

Concurrently, women who had actively participated in the civil rights movements and the political organizations of the New Left—notably the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee—had begun to identify and rebel against the hypocrisy of many of their male colleagues whose battles for equal rights and championing of non-hierarchical authority did not, in practice, extend to women.¹⁴¹ In 1966, Friedan, Shirley Chisholm, and twenty-six others formed the National Organization for Women (NOW), with Friedan serving as its first president. Convened as a civil rights organization, NOW established seven Task Forces aimed at various issues, ranging from equal opportunity employment, to the family structure, and various legal and religious doctrines deemed oppressive and unjust.¹⁴² They also took up the cause of legalizing abortion: the landmark U. S. Supreme Court case of *Roe v. Wade* occurred in 1973, ruling that a woman may legally end her pregnancy through abortion up to the point that the fetus is deemed “viable,” and thus able to exist outside the womb.

¹⁴⁰ “The American Housewife,” wrote Friedan, “was healthy, beautiful, educated concerned only about her husband, her children, her home.” Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 12-14.

¹⁴¹ Stokeley Carmichael’s infamous comment in 1964 that “the only position for women in SNCC is prone” often gets cited as the most extreme example of this misogynistic double-standard though certainly there were other similar sentiments from supposedly liberal men actively engaged in The Movement who nonetheless continued to relegate women to subordinate status. On another occasion in 1968, a male member of the SDS’ Strike Coordinating Committee walked into a deliberation of four women preparing a theoretical statement demanding “a chick to do some typing.” See Peter Babcox, “Meet the Women of the Revolution,” *New York Times*, February 6, 1969.

¹⁴² The seven task forces were, officially: Equal Opportunity of Employment; Legal and Political Rights; Education; Women in Poverty; The Family; Image of Women; and Women and Religion.

Between 1968 and 1975, the women's movement made swift and tremendous strides, due in large part to increased media coverage of marches, protests, and guerilla tactics.¹⁴³ New York City's public urban spaces—its sidewalks, streets, and parks—had become spaces for rebellion, exhibitionism, protest, and confrontation. Tensions between the sexes often ran high. One of the most notorious events to garner coverage occurred in 1968, when 100-150 women staged a demonstration at the Miss America Pageant in Atlantic City. The women, “mostly middle-aged careerists and housewives with a sprinkling of 20-year-olds and grandmothers in their 80s,” according to one *New York Times* article, employed a variety of guerilla tactics, which included crowning a sheep, parading a Miss America puppet with chains hanging around her neck (representing “the chains that tie us to these beauty standards against our will”). Most memorably, these women threw items such as girdles, high-heeled shoes, tweezers, and bras into a “Freedom Trash Can” and then threatened to burn them all as a symbol of freedom from the “enslavement” to “ludicrous beauty standards.”¹⁴⁴ The protesters also refused to speak with any males (including reporters), believing, as one protester noted, it was “impossible for men to understand.”¹⁴⁵ Many men took offense at the actions. According to one article, one man yelled at the picketers to “go home and wash your bras” while another suggested that the women throw

¹⁴³ According to Van Gosse, the feminist movement gained significant ground due to increased media attention in the year 1969-1970. In 1970 alone, the following key publications appeared: Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* (1970-71); Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (1970); Robin Morgan's *Sisterhood is Powerful* (1970), one of the first widely-available anthologies of Second Wave feminist writings; Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch* (1970); and the early newsprint copy of *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, which sold more than 250,000 books in three years, and was later republished by a major publisher in 1973, selling four million copies over the next ten years. In 1972, Shirley Chisholm became the first black congresswoman to be voted into office. The following year, the Supreme Court ruled to make abortion legally available to women in the landmark *Roe v. Wade* ruling (1973). See Van Gosse's chapters on “Women's Liberation and Second-Wave Feminism” and “Winning and Losing: The New Left Democratizes America,” in the book *Rethinking the New Left* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

¹⁴⁴ Charlotte Curtiss, “Miss America Pageant is Picketed by 100 Women,” *New York Times*, September 8, 1969.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 81.

themselves in the Freedom Trash Can, as “it would be a lot more useful.”¹⁴⁶ The radicalism and theatricality of the protest paid off in media coverage: as the same *New York Times* article reported, “television and news photographers were allowed and even encouraged to photograph the pickets,” while the women intensified their activities once they recognized they were on camera.¹⁴⁷ Winogrand, of course, was fascinated with this relationship between media coverage and the staging of political events, as discussed in my first chapter.

One image, described in Chapter One within the context of mediated public relations, suggests Winogrand’s interest in the confrontational energy between men and women at such protests [fig. 2.13]. Though this photograph does not appear in *Women are Beautiful*, it was taken at the same time he was producing that body of work, and included in his later project, *Public Relations*. Amidst a densely packed crowd, Winogrand, who seems to have been situated in the center of the action, photographed a woman, wearing a women’s liberation t-shirt, as she raises her hands and speaks directly into a microphone held out to her by a male reporter. His pursed lips suggest that he is speaking to her while she talks. A crowd of onlookers, both male and female, focus on the action. To the left is the extended lens of a camera. This equipment calls attention to the mediated act of looking itself, and how the knowledge that one is being recorded, televised or photographed affects subjects’ behavior. Further, a woman in sunglasses, who stands directly behind the male reporter, faces Winogrand, and looks into the camera. This direct engagement subverts the notion that Winogrand’s subjects were unaware that they are being looked at. Like the two photographs discussed at the opening of this chapter, this image

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 81. Other anonymous critics wrote letters to some of the protesters, addressed to “Dear Ugly” and suggesting that the reason these women disrupted the pageant had more to do with personal insecurities about their “homely” appearance than any substantive political action, as “only an insane person would do a thing like this.” See Peter Babcox, “Meet the Women of the Revolution,” *New York Times*, February 6, 1969.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 81.

calls attention to the act of voyeurism itself, rather than simply “implicating” Winogrand as a solitary voyeur or as he would have described himself, as a “girl watcher.”

The terms “girl watching” and “voyeurism” benefit from a degree of historical contextualization. The former suggests, in Winogrand’s case, the act of looking at young women, perhaps with an erotic interest, though without any overtly lurid or lascivious intent.¹⁴⁸ The term “voyeurism,” however, had a different connotation at the time, and was still largely tied to its psychiatric definition, and seen as a deviant behavior in the manner of a “peeping Tom.” In this definition, voyeurism implied an uncontrollable sexual desire to look at unsuspecting subjects, often of the opposite sex, either in a state of undress or engaged in overt sexual activity. Though its pathology was alluded to in films such as *Rear Window* (1954), and, to a more ambiguous extent, *Blow Up* (1966), the term itself did not appear in literature or film reviews until the late 1970s.¹⁴⁹ By the mid-1970s and certainly by the 1980s, “voyeurism” came to be considered less as a deviant behavior, and was beginning to be understood in broader terms, as the act of looking at a subject who is unaware that s/he is being watched. The implications of that one-sided exchange might be erotic, though it was not necessarily defined in such terms. When such acts of looking were amplified by the effects of mass media, the term also assumed a less solitary association, and moved towards becoming what writer Clay Calvert defined in his book, *Voyeur Nation* (2000) as “mediated voyeurism.”¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁸ Winogrand used this phrase “girl watching” in the early stages of pitching the idea for *Women are Beautiful*, noting that the book might have an appeal for those men who enjoyed such activities.

¹⁴⁹ For more on this topic, see Jonathan M. Metz, “From Scopophilia to Survivor: A Brief History of Voyeurism,” in *Textual Practice* 18:3 (2004), 418.

¹⁵⁰ In his book, *Voyeur Nation: Media, Peering In* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000), Clay Calvert focuses on the social forces shaping the rise of mediated voyeurism in the form of reality television and surveillance. His use of the term voyeurism epitomizes the way the meaning of the word itself has changed since the 1980s and 1990s in particular.

Winogrand was making photographs of women at precisely that moment when awareness of “mediated voyeurism” was gaining cultural currency through publications such as Boorstin’s *The Image* and Marshall McLuhan’s highly influential *Understanding Media* (1964). As a street photographer who began making pictures in the mid to late 1950s, Winogrand was well situated to witness the ways in which photography, television, magazines, and newspapers perpetuated and accelerated these shifts in the social landscape. Certain examples in his personal work as a street photographer, therefore, might be seen as an overt acknowledgement of the “mediated voyeurism,” inherent in the genre of street photography itself, particularly when the act of looking at women was the subject of his photograph.

This awareness may be seen in one early street view from the mid-1950s [fig. 2.14]. In this image, shot on a city sidewalk, two young men leaning against the wall of a building. One man looks off into the distance, while the other male figure stands with his arms crossed in front of him, and looks in the direction of a woman whose body is only half-visible at the left of the composition. The woman appears to be walking out of the frame, her left arm and leg extended and swinging behind her. Although the viewer is not able to make out the woman’s countenance or the front half of her silhouette, there is enough visual information about this female subject to determine that she is, like many of Winogrand’s female subjects from this period, neatly and fashionably dressed. Dynamism like hers is central to Winogrand’s aesthetic: she is shown on the move, her body determinedly negotiating her way through the urban setting. The image is not simply a photograph about a male photographer looking at a passive, unsuspecting female subject. Rather, it is a picture about men who are “girl watching,” and a female subject who actively strides through the city.

Select pictures in *Women are Beautiful* reflect a more complex representation of mediated voyeurism. In one photograph, Winogrand pictures a dense crowd of people gathered in what appears to be Central Park [fig. 2.15]. Just left of center, a striking African American woman wearing a large hat and a completely transparent mesh top stands amidst a mostly male group. Though her breasts are completely exposed and she has clearly attracted the attention of the people around her, she appears unperturbed, and poses for the crowd, her right elbow bent, hand on her hip. One older man, standing just to her left and behind her, leans in, ostensibly to get a better view of her chest. Several men with cameras are shown pointing their apparatus directly at the woman, or gesturing in her direction. Though Winogrand himself was clearly a part of this crowd of male onlookers, his frame takes in the larger spectacle this woman has commanded. While she appears poised and glamorous, the men surrounding her are somewhat buffoonish in their fervor to snap a picture of her. The image is thus as much about a male desire to look at an attractive and provocatively dressed woman as it is the humorous and somewhat pathetic attempts by men to sneak a peek at a mode of conspicuous self-presentation that is definitely out of the ordinary.

This picture also focuses on a woman who appears very comfortable with a degree of bodily self-display that would have been considered indecent ten years prior. For many young women who came of age in the late 1960s, the combined ideologies of the women's liberation movement and the sexual revolution instilled greater sexual self-confidence, and an increased familiarity and comfort level with their own bodies. The sexual revolution effectively challenged the moral stigma long associated with extramarital sex, and both women and men explored their sexuality as a means of fostering greater human connection and rejecting the nuclear family ideal that had been championed by their parents' generation in the 1950s. This development, coupled

with the commercial availability of the pill and women's increasing medical, biological, and intellectual awareness of themselves, empowered women.¹⁵¹ Many cultural producers used feminist agendas as their primary subject matter. In literature, Erica Jong's novel *Fear of Flying* (1973) broke ground with its promiscuous and sexually adventurous female anti-heroine Isadora Wing, known for her casual one-time sexual encounters with no strings attached. (Winogrand's first choice of writer for *Women are Beautiful* was, as previously mentioned, Erica Jong). In the art world, the graphic nude performances of Carolee Schneemann, the photographic self-portraits of an unclothed Hannah Wilke (herself a former model), and the parodic pin-up self-portrait of Lynda Benglis raised eyebrows of those who felt their overt displays of firm, attractive female flesh (their own), as *both* a form of feminist erotics and a reclamation of patriarchal stereotypes

¹⁵¹ The classic feminist medical guide *Our Bodies, Ourselves* was indicative of this heightened agency and awareness. It was compiled in 1970 by a group of Boston women and was aimed at rectifying (or simply replacing) what they perceived to be the paternalistic and misinformed agendas of male doctors. First issued as a 193-page stapled newsprint tract by the New England Free Press under the title "Women and Their Bodies," *Our Bodies, Ourselves* sold 250,000 copies before a commercial edition, published by Simon & Schuster and compiled by the Boston Women's Health Collective, came out in 1973 under the title *Our Bodies, Ourselves* and went on to sell millions of copies worldwide. As Gail Collins notes, it was a publication considered essential reading for many women heading off to college in the early 1970s, despite its controversial reception. See Alexandra Jacobs, "A Feminist Classic Gets a Makeover," *New York Times*, July 17, 2005, and Collins, 167. The book's content emphasized straightforward, explicit discussions of sex, birth control, venereal disease, childbirth, lesbianism, postpartum depression, and menopause, along with graphic illustrations of genitalia and personal testimonies that emphasized feeling and intuition as a legitimate (and most significant) gauge of one's physical and emotional health issues. Significantly, it emphasized an anti-materialistic, natural (or "hippie") and un-glamorized view of women's bodies in an effort to raise consciousness about internalized "sexist" views of female sexuality. (Notably, Aretha Franklin released her top ten hit "(You Make Me Feel Like) a Natural Woman", in 1967; it was also recorded by Carole King, one of the song's co-writers, and included on her 1971 album *Tapestry*). Not surprisingly, *Our Bodies, Ourselves* was highly controversial, banned by high schools and libraries. But it was also taken to task by those sympathetic to the women's movement yet troubled by the essentialist celebration of women's physiology as the key to self-knowledge and, ultimately, full liberation. Eleanor Lester, writing in the *New York Times*, called the book "disheartening," and even regressive, stating that the book's emphasis on biology as destiny basically took "the long way round back to the feminine mystique of the psychiatrized fifties." Christopher Lehmann-Haupt, also writing in the *New York Times* as a self-admitted "male in the ointment," championed the book's frank and discussion about "The Anatomy and Physiology of Reproduction and Sexuality," but also pointed up the rhetorical disjuncture between the book's emphasis on "living less in our heads" and responding to "feelings" and its "overriding message that women must know and think about their bodies" in order to gain agency over their lives. See Eleanor Lester, "A Revisionist View of Female Sexuality: *Our Bodies, Ourselves*," *New York Times*, May 30, 1973, and Christopher Lehmann-Haupt, "Thinking about the Thinkable," *New York Times*, March 13, 1973.

was an impossibly hypocritical strategy.¹⁵² In various ways, each of these artists and writers—to name but a few—encouraged a radical rethinking of female sexuality, the institution of marriage, and childrearing by women, on their own terms. These cultural currents cannot be ignored when looking at Winogrand’s photographs of women today.

The public self-display of the woman in Winogrand’s Central Park photograph also benefits from historicization. During the 1950s, the spaces in which both middle-class men and women might have seen such “spectacles” were semi-private arenas: places such as night clubs and burlesque theatres, for example. Winogrand photographed in both settings, while working on assignment as a magazine photographer during this period. In 1955 he made a series of photographs in El Morocco, a New York City nightclub frequented by wealthy and celebrity elites that was established in the 1930s, but which declined in popularity by 1960 [fig. 2.16]. At around this time, he also photographed in a New York City burlesque theater, making both color and black and white photographs of female performers as they participated in the show [fig. 2.17]. It is important, then, to understand the malleability of such terms as “girl watching,” “voyeurism,” and “eroticism,” over time when considering a photograph such as this one, as such definitions are tied to changing sexual mores, and shifting notions of public and private bodily display.

The relevance of “the city,” also factors into this discussion of Winogrand’s women. From a cultural perspective, “the city” was also perceived as a freer, more vibrant place for many women than the suburbs, or at least for the women who could afford to live there. In his 1965 book *The City is the Frontier* (referenced earlier), Charles Abrams addressed this income

¹⁵² Each of these artists—all of whom were acknowledged as attractive, even beautiful—were at various times criticized as being narcissistic, art-world pin-ups, pandering to the male gaze at a time when, as Maria Buszek has argued, “few feminists saw either the humor or the pleasure” in this visual strategy. Maria Elena Buszek, *Pin-Up Grrrls: Feminism, Sexuality, Popular Culture* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006), 288-302.

disparity as he wrote about the importance of making cities “more livable for the female” as part of his “blueprints for American Cities.”¹⁵³ He bemoaned the lack of certain social services—such as affordable middle-class housing, day-care centers, nurseries, and good schools—that made family life more difficult in the cities, and one of the main reasons for “the spurt to suburbia.”¹⁵⁴ But he also conceded that the city held a distinct advantage when it came to working mothers who could find a wider variety of nearby employment opportunities. Though Abrams’s text was decidedly uncritical about certain subjects that many feminists found problematic, his comments point to the growing social and economic realities that women faced when they decided to either stay in the city or leave for the suburbs.¹⁵⁵

This dichotomy, between “city life” and “suburban life,” was prevalent in much of the critical writing of the time, specifically as it effected social expectations and aspirations for women. Though both “the city” and “the suburbs” are themselves highly complex entities, each generating an enormous amount of discourse particularly during the post-World War II era and continuing through the 1970s, certain popular conceptions resonated with women, particularly those who were white, educated and of the middle class. For them, the city symbolized excitement, new possibilities, a professional career, and a space for freedom and self-exploration. “Suburbia” was perceived to be more restrictive and conformist. Life in the city was an assertion of a non-traditional lifestyle, one that was less certain, possibly more dangerous, but nonetheless full of exciting possibilities. The city was seen also as a place of potential empowerment. Helen Gary Bishop’s essay in *Women are Beautiful* suggests precisely this conception, writing about

¹⁵³ Abrams, 337.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 345.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 339. Abrams saw nothing particularly wrong, for example, with the airline industry’s policy of hiring attractive single or divorced females that had to meet certain weight requirements as “hostesses,” nor did his ideas deviate from the presumption that single women desired marriage and motherhood first and foremost.

“Winogrand Women” as being “confident of purpose...and aware of the place [they occupy] in space and time...acutely conscious of the powerful appeal of the feminine attributes.”¹⁵⁶

Life in the suburbs, conversely, suggested to these same women the opposite qualities of life: security, conformity, monotony, and for some, even entrapment. “Those ugly and endless sprawls which are becoming a national problem,” as Betty Friedan described the suburbs in *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), represented a less satisfying lifestyle for women, one that meant giving up a professional career and intellectual pursuits in order to stay at home, raise children and become a full-time housewife. Friedan made the distinction between city and suburban lifestyles explicit, as she noted: “The ability of suburban life to fulfill...the able, educated American woman seems to depend on her...strength to resist the pressures to conform, resist the time-filling busywork of suburban house and community, and find, or make, the same kind of serious commitment outside the home that she would have made in the city.”¹⁵⁷

For one female viewer of Winogrand’s photograph of a woman—an image which was later reproduced on a commemorative stamp from the Masters of Photography series (2001)—these correlations between female empowerment and the city rang true from a personal perspective. In this picture, a tall, thin blond woman crosses a street in New York City, her hair caught in the wind and blowing across her face [figs. 2.18, 2.19]. After seeing, by chance, the stamp with Winogrand’s photograph, Susan Loden recognized the picture’s subject as her older sister, Barbara Loden. At the time Loden was photographed by Winogrand, she was living in

¹⁵⁶ Helen Gary Bishop, “Winogrand Women,” in *Women are Beautiful*, unpaginated.

¹⁵⁷ Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 233. Winogrand, incidentally, photographed Friedan at an opening at the Whitney Museum of Art in 1969, a portrait later included in his fifteen-print portfolio titled *Big Shots*, published in 1983. This portfolio was published by Fraenkel Publications. In addition to Friedan’s portrait, it included Winogrand’s photographs of John F. Kennedy, Marilyn Monroe, Jackie Robinson, Andy Warhol, Richard Nixon, Norma Mailer, John Huston, Nelson Rockefeller, Hugh Hefner, Muhammad Ali, George Wallace, Diane Arbus, John Glenn, and Lyndon Johnson.

New York City, having moved at age sixteen from a small town in North Carolina to pursue a career in modeling and acting. She had considerable success in television, film, and theater, earning a Tony Award in 1964 for her performance in Arthur Miller's play *After the Fall*. In 1969, she married noted film director Elia Kazan, and in 1971, she wrote, directed, produced, and starred in the independent and critically acclaimed feature film *Wanda*, a series of accomplishments few, if any, women at that time could equal. In 1980, at the age of forty-eight, Loden died of breast cancer. It is through this veil that Susan Loden views Winogrand's photograph of her sister. As she reflected:

At age 16, Barbara left her North Carolina home for New York City. She was alone. She had guts. New York City was her place and the 1960s her time. This is her face, her eyes, her body, her hair, her presence, her demeanor. Enlarged, the image is ghostlike... I am astounded and proud, but not surprised, that she has made her way back into view.¹⁵⁸

Embedded in Susan Loden's very personal recollection of her sister is thus a conception of New York City in the 1960s as both individually and historically situated: it was "her place and...her time." Barbara Loden "had guts," leaving Marion, North Carolina behind to pursue an acting career, "alone," in a city that was at once intimidating and enervating. In Winogrand's picture, Susan Loden does not simply see a beautiful woman crossing the street, or the voyeuristic indulgence of a male photographer, but a very specific individual whose "presence" and "demeanor" are convincingly depicted. Her "energy," as Winogrand would have called it, derives from the cultural currents of a specific time and place on the streets of New York City.

Conclusion

¹⁵⁸ Susan Loden, "That's My Sister on that 37cent Stamp." Published as an online news release for the University of Central Florida in 2002 or 2003. Hard Copy in Garry Winogrand Archives, Center for Creative Photography, The University of Arizona, AG 72.

In 1981, six years after *Women are Beautiful* was published, and three years before his death, Winogrand was interviewed by journalist Babaralee Diamondstein. He acknowledged:

I always have compulsively photographed women. The difficulty for me of dealing with the pictures—let's say, where the woman is attractive, is [the question of] is it an interesting picture or is it [interesting] because the woman is attractive? I don't think I always got it straight.¹⁵⁹

By his own admission, Winogrand was not always able to wrestle form and content into a frame when photographing women. They proved to be the one subject that created fissures in what Winogrand held to be an otherwise rock-solid rhetoric about the nature of photographic seeing. He “didn't always get it straight.”¹⁶⁰ Later in his interview with Diamondstein, when asked specifically about *Women are Beautiful*, Winogrand kidded that he thought he might publish a sequel, and title it “Son of Women are Beautiful,” but then quickly revealed the joke, adding “That's all we need, another book like that!”¹⁶¹

By this point in his career, Winogrand had thus come to terms with the book's lack of commercial and critical success. He also admitted that though women were, as photographic subjects, a lifelong compulsion, they also posed a problem for him as a photographer, too easily

¹⁵⁹ See interview with Barbaralee Diamondstein, “Visions and Images: American Photographers on Photography: Garry Winogrand.” (1981) [now part of the digital collections at Duke University: <http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/dsva/>].

¹⁶⁰ What, exactly, did “getting it straight,” mean for Winogrand? It meant that in order to make an “interesting” picture, the photograph should always be considered as a two-dimensional representation, with its own pictorial structure, necessarily divorced the social and political specificities—or, the “narrative,” as Winogrand might have defined it—of his chosen subjects. He was eminently quotable on this topic, as epitomized by this statement he made in 1982: “There isn't a photograph in the world that has any narrative... They do not tell stories. They show you what something looks like, to a camera... The minute you relate this thing [pointing to a photograph] to what was photographed, it's a lie. It's two-dimensional, it's the illusion of literal description. The thing has to be complete in the frame, whether you have that narrative information or not... It's a picture problem, it's part of what makes things interesting.” Quote extracted from Bill Moyers televised program featuring stories on Emmet Gowin and Garry Winogrand (“Creativity,” WNET, 1982).

¹⁶¹ Winogrand followed this quote by stating: “I think it's an interesting book, but I don't think it's as good as the other books I've done.” Diamondstein, Barbaralee. *Visions and Images American Photographers on Photography* (New York: Rizzoli International Publishers, 1981), 187.

throwing him off of his game. Whether he came to this assessment on his own, or was ultimately convinced by the influential and highly valued opinions of John Szarkowski and Tod Papageorge, is unclear. But this characterization—that Winogrand’s pictures of women rank among his least successful pictures—has endured to his day, with no concerted effort to reinterpret the work within the context of either Winogrand’s own oeuvre, or the broader socio-political context in which the pictures were made.

As argued in this chapter, the way that Winogrand photographed women on the streets and public spaces of Manhattan during the later 1960s and early 1970s, and the manner in which women presented themselves in these photographs, has as much to do with the radical political and social changes that impacted women in the city during these years as it does with the photographer’s personal artistic evolution. The passage of history has shown the modernist rhetoric that previously informed discussions of Winogrand’s women pictures to be incomplete. As viewers look back at these photographs today they recognize that signifiers as dress, body language, gesture, and hairstyle are dated to a specific period in American society. The women in *Women are Beautiful* are seen through Winogrand’s lens as a complex variety of attractive female subjects who embody the rebellious and physical confidence that characterized the historical moment in which they were photographed. Symbolically and, at times, literally, these women look back at us in these images through the shifting lenses of time and history.

Chapter Three: “To See the Facts Without Blinking”: Robert Adams and the Romantic Tradition in the “New” American West

In a black-and-white photograph by Robert Adams (b. 1937), a young girl wearing a white dress and white lace tights walks, in stocking feet, in the middle of a street lined with trailer homes and parked cars [fig. 3.1]. She looks directly into the camera. Behind her, in the distance, another child rides his bike. Pavement consumes the bottom third of the photograph, and power and telephone wires cross the image in the middle ground. There are no visible sidewalks. In the distance, barely discernible is a faint parcel of undeveloped land. Permeating the scene is a bright, Western light, characterized by Adams as having a “cold, dry brilliance” that exacerbates the photograph’s astringent clarity.¹⁶²

This image appears approximately halfway through Adams’s 1977 publication *denver: A Photographic Survey of the Metropolitan Area*, in a section titled “Our Homes.”¹⁶³ The 120-page book includes ninety-three images that depict Denver’s rapidly expanding suburban residential and commercial development in the late 1960s and early 1970s.¹⁶⁴ Through the inclusion of broad, empty spaces and the separation between the two children, this image exemplifies the book’s overarching subject: the alienation of people from the natural environment, from one another, and from a sense of community within these new suburban spaces. As Adams notes in the book’s introduction, these photographs present a “troubling mixture” of the evidence of new

¹⁶² Robert Adams, introduction to *The New West* (Boulder: Colorado Associated Press, 1974), 23.

¹⁶³ *denver: A Photographic Survey of the Metropolitan Area* (Boulder: Colorado Associated Press, in Cooperation with the State Historical Society of Colorado, 1977) is divided into eight categories, which appear sequentially in this order: “Land Surrounded; To Be Developed”; “Factories; Industrial Land”; “Our Homes”; “Trees”; “Shopping Centers; Commercial Land”; “Roads”; and “Agricultural Land in the Path of Development.”

¹⁶⁴ Adams’s first major publication was *The New West*, which appeared in 1974. *What We Bought: The New World Scenes from the Denver Metropolitan Area, 1970-1974*, which wasn’t published as a book until 1995, nonetheless included images of similar subjects from this period.

development and the human beings who live there; people who are, in Adams's words, “admirable and deserving of our thought and care.”¹⁶⁵

A comparison between Robert Adams’s photograph and an image by his predecessor Ansel Adams (1902-1984, no relation to Robert Adams), made approximately thirty years earlier, highlights the different aesthetic approaches to similar subject matter taken by these two photographers [fig. 3.2]. Titled *Child in Mountain Meadow, Yosemite National Park, California* (1941), this photograph depicts a young girl standing in a verdant tree-lined meadow. She is placed slightly off-center and in the background of the image, wearing dungaree overalls and a straw hat, gazing up to the right. Sunlight appears to bathe the grassy, bloom-filled meadow. Unlike Robert Adams’s photograph, this image is composed such that no sky is visible. Rather, the entire frame is filled with the lushness of natural forms. As it appears in the book *This is the American Earth* (first published in 1960), the photograph is accompanied by a text, written by Nancy Newhall: “You shall enter the living shelter of the forest. You shall walk where only the wind has walked before.”¹⁶⁶ The suggestion here is that a complete immersion in nature signifies

¹⁶⁵ Robert Adams, introduction to *denver*, 7. When Adams included this photograph in his 1989 Aperture publication, *To Make It Home: Photographs of the American West*, he juxtaposed the image with text extracted from the opening paragraphs of his introductory essay for *denver*, which reads: “In Denver’s vacant lots one can still find, no matter how numerous the food wrappers and pieces of Styrofoam, an old, tough, green—Spanish bayonet, cactus, and sage. Perhaps most reassuring of all, there remain cottonwoods, those commercially useless trees that are habitat for birds and children. Whether I was photographing these accidental sanctuaries, however, or bare, new tracts, I tried to keep in mind a phrase from the novel by Kawabata: “My life, a fragment of a landscape.” The same applied, I thought, to each of us...” Adams, *To Make It Home: Photographs of the American West* (New York: Aperture, 1989), 50. In *denver*, this same text appears but with the addition of this extension to the last sentence: “The same applied, I thought, to each of us, and to the objects with which we live. My goal was not only to record the animate and inanimate fragments, but to show the totality, the landscape.”

¹⁶⁶ Ansel Adams and Nancy Newhall, *This is the American Earth* (San Francisco: Sierra Club, 1992), 80. This book, first published in 1960, evolved from a 1955 exhibition of the same name, co-organized by the Sierra Club and the California Academy of Sciences. The show opened first at the Le Conte Memorial Lodge in Yosemite Valley, and then in numerous international venues. Both the exhibition and publication were organized on the theme of conservation, and meant to highlight the early history of the country’s environmental awareness, from the mid nineteenth century to the early 1960s, as a means to inspire appreciation for and preservation of National Parks and wilderness areas. The book includes what Christi and Beaumont Newhall describe in the introduction to the 1992 edition as “impassioned, poetic text” by Nancy Newhall, and more than fifty black-and-white photographs. Half of

protection (as a “living shelter”) and nascent discovery (as a place where “only the wind has walked before”). The girl’s attire, which one associates with rural or small town life, also conjures a certain idea of benevolent pastoralism, wherein nature and humankind coexist harmoniously.

This cursory formal comparison easily suggests two very different conceptions of the relationship between human beings and the landscape of the American West. In Robert Adams’s photograph, the connection seems precarious, imbalanced, even nonexistent. Aesthetically, there are no visual tropes to reinforce an idealized notion of the Western landscape, no painterly references, soaring mountain vistas, or dramatic atmospheric effects to inspire awe, mythologize or sentimentalize his subject. Robert Adams does not depict the West as a National Park or National Forest, but rather as a rapidly expanding suburbia. It is very clearly a place where people live. His photograph is characterized by an aesthetic austerity and a cool, detached approach to its subject, which he ensures by maintaining a distance from the child and representing her without sentimentality, amidst the mundane, suburban environment. This way of seeing reflects Adams’s desire “to see the facts without blinking,” as he would later state.¹⁶⁷ Ansel Adams’s photograph, by contrast, is far more idyllic. Beyond the seemingly benign presence of the child herself, there are no traces of human intervention (other than that of the photographer himself). The relationship between human beings and the undisturbed natural landscape is seen as peaceful and harmonious. Further, Newhall’s extended prose-poem imparts religious overtones to the landscape, suggesting that nature provides a source of divine revelation

the images were made by Ansel Adams, the others by well-known photographers including Werner Bischof, Margaret Bourke-White, William Garrett, Eliot Porter and Edward Weston.

¹⁶⁷ Robert Adams, introduction to *The New West*, 11.

from which a new moral and spiritual order may be born.¹⁶⁸ It is not surprising that when Robert Adams first exhibited his photographs of new suburban development along Colorado's Front Range in the early 1970s, they were seen as being the absolute opposite of Ansel Adams's Romantic conceptions of the American West.¹⁶⁹

Such distinctions, however, tend to obfuscate the strong formal and philosophical connections between the two photographers. In strictly aesthetic/technical terms, both men were deeply committed to making formally rigorous compositions and finely crafted prints. Though Robert Adams was not an adherent of Ansel's complex zone system, he consistently maintained a meticulous control of film development and printing technique to ensure deep blacks, blinding whites, and rich, suffused grays.¹⁷⁰ Both men also purposefully composed their views.¹⁷¹ Ansel Adams's theory of "previsualization" held that all the compositional elements that would appear in a final print were considered and conceived before the moment of exposure. Robert Adams articulated his approach as a theory of "Form," which he defined as "an unarguably right

¹⁶⁸ The structure of *This is the American Earth* further underscores this notion. The book begins with a largely unhappy history of man's destruction of the planet that ends with the hopeful message that human salvation is possible if humankind turns "to the earth" in deference and humility. Significantly, "the earth" most capable of offering salvation is quite specifically the American West. John Szarkowski writes in his discussion of *This is the American Earth*: "Intentionally or otherwise, the book projects a Calvinist insularity. It appears to see most of the world as beyond salvation, and the American West as the last chance for the New Jerusalem." John Szarkowski, *Ansel Adams at 100* (Boston, New York, London: Little, Brown, 2001), 44.

¹⁶⁹ Ansel Adams's and Robert Adams's photographs have often been compared. For a thoughtful, recent discussion, see Allison N. Kemmerer's essay in *Reinventing the West: The Photographs of Ansel Adams and Robert Adams* (Andover, MA: Addison Gallery of American Art, 2001), 11-21.

¹⁷⁰ The zone system was conceived by Ansel Adams and Fred Archer in 1939-1940 as a means for ensuring optimal exposure and development of a negative, after "previsualizing" a final print. This highly calibrated system of measurement was based on the idea that a photographic printing paper could be divided into ten zones of tonality, from pure black to pure white. By assessing the relation between values of gray in a given scene, and "exposing for the shadows, developing for the highlights," photographers could ensure the best possible negative from which to produce the desired print.

¹⁷¹ For the photographs that would appear in *The New West*, Robert Adams used a medium-format, hand-held 2 ¼" camera (either a Rolleiflex or Hasselblad). In addition to producing square negatives, this camera allowed him greater speed and flexibility than the more cumbersome larger format view camera he had used in previous projects, which included both *White Churches of the Plains* (1970) and *The Architecture and Art of Early Hispanic Colorado* (1974).

relationship of shapes, a visual stability in which all components are equally important.”¹⁷² This adherence was, for him, essential for an image’s success, for it offered a means for seeing beyond the “literal facts” of the world to an ideal scene, which pointed to “an order beyond itself, a landscape into which all fragments, no matter how imperfect, fit perfectly.”¹⁷³

Perhaps most significantly, both photographers shared a deep appreciation for the Romantic conception of the wilderness of the American West. As an idea, at least, if not always a lived reality, both Ansel and Robert Adams believed that engaging with the natural Western landscape provided both artistic inspiration and spiritual sustenance. This sentiment resonates in a letter to Ansel Adams that Robert Adams wrote on June 26, 1979, at the age of 42, after having attained a certain degree of career success for his own photographs of the “new” West. The text is worth quoting at length to elucidate the degree to which Robert Adams acknowledges the importance of his predecessor’s photographs to his own struggle over how to conceive of the contemporary Western landscape. Inspired to write after “an hour spent...with my old and much thumbed copy of *This is the American Earth*,” he wrote:

I think I’ve wanted to write this note for several years, but have been afraid it would inevitably amount to the cliché of a fan letter, something you have plenty of already. Well...what I want to say is that I am grateful to you for your pictures, which have rescued me often from my own despair.

I was lucky enough to know parts of the West in a better day, and that knowledge is, as you must experience it too, now both an inspiration and a burden; one wonders, at dark times, whether one actually did live in a cleaner world. It is the power of your pictures to confirm that it existed. And to suggest, I think, that it is eternal, no matter what happens to be out in front of us at the moment.

Let me add that I suspect it might seem a little pestiferous to have some upstart, albeit obscure, running around with the same name doing landscapes. My apologies, and thanks for your good grace (when people ask me if we’re related I

¹⁷² Robert Adams, introduction to *denver*, 8.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 8.

have it easy—I say I wish I were so lucky).¹⁷⁴

As the letter suggests, Robert Adams clearly believed, on a personal level, in the psychological and emotional importance of Ansel Adams's Romantic photographic conception of the American West. As he notes, "your pictures...have rescued me often from my own despair." Adams's words go so far as to suggest that these photographs offered a kind of salvation—something for which he himself was searching (though perhaps did not always find) when making pictures of the rapidly changing, suburbanized Colorado landscape. Adams's words also reveal his belief in an ideal, "eternal" American West, indicating that he very clearly assigned an ideological significance to this landscape that went well beyond the mere recording of facts. He thus came to photograph the subject of the new West from a Romantic tradition, even if he did not romanticize his imagery in the way that Ansel Adams did.¹⁷⁵ In fact, the younger photographer felt he could not, in good conscience, make photographs that avoided depicting the hard truths about what he saw happening to the natural landscape. As Robert Adams stated later, making an oblique reference to Ansel Adams's Edenic visions, "the Garden was off limits," however enticing that prospect may have seemed.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁴ Robert Adams to Ansel Adams, June 26, 1979. Ansel Adams Archive, Center for Creative Photography, The University of Arizona, Tucson (Folder AG31:1:1:1).

¹⁷⁵ It is perhaps useful to outline briefly the distinction between Romanticism and romanticism here, in terms of my understanding and usage throughout this essay. The term "romanticism" implies a more populist definition, and relates to the idealization of a landscape such that its less sanguine or even disturbing subjects are absent from the scene. In the instance of Ansel Adams's romanticization, his Western landscapes avoided depicting any evidence of tourism or industry that had, in reality, begun to transform parts of the American West previously left untouched by such incursions. Romanticism, however, in modern Anglo-American history, derives from a deep strain in American Transcendentalist thought, rooted in the mid-nineteenth-century philosophies of Henry David Thoreau who put forth the notion that personal salvation could be found through direct experience in untamed "wildness." Ansel Adams's debts to American Transcendentalism are documented in Anne Hammond, *Ansel Adams: Divine Performances* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).

¹⁷⁶ Robert Adams, interview in *Landscape: Theory* (New York: Lustrum Press, 1980), 6.

The inherent Romanticism informing Robert Adams's work has not, until recently, been readily acknowledged. This deep literary, artistic, and philosophical connection is important to consider when assessing the whole of Robert Adams's photographs of the Colorado landscape during the mid-1960s to 1970s. The notion that direct experiences with untouched wilderness could reconnect humanity and nature, and thus provide a sense of hope and personal salvation derives from a strain of American Transcendentalist thought that harkens back to the mid-nineteenth-century philosophies of Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862). This idea is encapsulated in his well-known quote that "in Wildness is the preservation of the world."¹⁷⁷ Thoreau's conception of wilderness informed most subsequent environmental debates, particularly in the twentieth century, when his works were more widely appreciated than in his own time.¹⁷⁸ For men like naturalist and conservationist John Muir (1838-1914), whose fervent championing of wilderness exploration coincided with an increased national interest in conserving America's rapidly disappearing undeveloped areas during the 1870s, Thoreau's philosophies were a direct influence. Ansel Adams was certainly inspired by Muir's ideas. Beginning in 1916, the photographer became actively involved in the Sierra Club, a conservation group formed by Muir in 1892. In addition to serving on the Board of Directors for thirty-seven years beginning in 1934, Ansel Adams included excerpts from Muir's writings in his 1948 publication *Yosemite and the Sierra Nevada*, which was dedicated to the Sierra Club.¹⁷⁹ One year later, in 1949, the

¹⁷⁷ Henry David Thoreau, from his essay "Walking," first published in *The Atlantic Monthly* (1862). Scholars such as Max Oelschlaeger argue that though the idea of wilderness had various iterations throughout the twentieth century, Thoreau's conception has informed all environmental debates since. As Oelschlaeger writes: "it is no exaggeration to say that today all thought of the wilderness flows in *Walden*'s wake." Max Oelschlaeger, *The Idea of Wilderness* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 171.

¹⁷⁸ Oelschlaeger, 133.

¹⁷⁹ Ansel Adams joined the Sierra Club in 1916. Beginning in 1919, he spent four summers as custodian at the Club's [LeConte Memorial Lodge](#) in Yosemite Valley.

ecologist and forester Aldo Leopold (1887-1948) published his influential *A Sand County Almanac*, in which he articulated a new philosophy that conjoined ethics, aesthetics and ecology. Leopold's concepts of ecological consciousness and land ethics drew upon Thoreau's belief that in wilderness one finds salvation. However, Leopold also emphasized a call to action, suggesting that by "reappraising things unnatural, tame and confined in terms of things natural, wild and free," we might be able to inspire a wider cultural shift in values.¹⁸⁰ Western writers such as Wallace Stegner (1909-1993) upheld Leopold's assertions that changing our human-centered values through ecological consciousness required action. Further, Stegner called attention to Leopold's science and pragmatism, which was far removed from the enthusiasm, sentimentality, and high optimism of Muir's day. As Stegner went on to note, Leopold was not "one of those throbbing Nature lovers," but rather "a forester and ranger who had seen for himself the slow death of the land," at the hands of humans who privileged our own comfort and safety over that of the larger ecosystem.¹⁸¹ Leopold saw that these destructive habits wrought by humans, if left unchecked, "could eventually destroy us along with the earth we depend on."¹⁸²

Thus, by the time Robert Adams began photographing the American West during the mid-1960s, conceptions of "wilderness" had itself changed significantly. Though Thoreau's ideas were far from irrelevant, interpretations of his philosophies during the 1960s, through the writings of such figures as Stegner and his protégé, Edward Abbey (both of whom Robert Adams deeply admired), tended to focus on striving for harmony between humanity and Nature through a heightened ecological consciousness and land ethic rather than clinging to, as Stegner put it,

¹⁸⁰ Oelschlaeger, 207.

¹⁸¹ Wallace Stegner, "The Legacy of Aldo Leopold," in J. Baird Callicott, ed., *Companion to A Sand County Almanac, Interpretive and Critical Essays* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), 218.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 218.

“the energy, enthusiasm and optimism of our early years.”¹⁸³ As the environmental movement began to take shape, fueled by watershed publications as Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* (1962) and Barry Commoner’s *The Closing Circle* (1971), writers, critics, artists, and activists called into question the wisdom of defining wilderness as a place set apart from civilization. At the very least, they recognized, as did Robert Adams, the impossibility of addressing landscape exclusively through outworn Romantic metaphors. As Adams himself later noted in an essay about the little-known late nineteenth century South Dakota photographs of C.A. Hickman:

I am not questioning the value of photographs by Ansel Adams (two of whose prints hang in my home) or Eliot Porter. Their pictures of uninhabited nature are important exactly because they reveal the purity of wilderness, a purity we need to know. Attention only to perfection, however, invites eventually for urban viewers—which means most of us—a crippling disgust; our world is in most places far from clean...Photographers who can teach us to love even vacant lots will do so out of the same sense of wholeness that has inspired photographers of the past twenty-five years.¹⁸⁴

Robert Adams, who came to photography from a background in English literature, and not, significantly, from commercial or freelance editorial work (as did his contemporaries Lee Friedlander and Garry Winogrand), has readily acknowledged his environmental concerns in his own eloquent writings, which have been published in essay collections about his own work, as well as that of other photographers. In these texts, Adams’s sympathies with the Transcendentalist strain from Thoreau through Muir, Leopold, Stegner, Abbey, and others are readily apparent. His photographs, however, have, until very recently, been discussed as distinctly anti-romantic statements about the contemporary Western landscape. As I will explore in this essay, Adams’s chosen photographic aesthetic—often described as neutral and

¹⁸³ Ibid., 218.

¹⁸⁴ Robert Adams, “C.A. Hickman,” in Adams, *Beauty in Photography: Essays in Defense of Traditional Values* (New York: Aperture, 1981), 104-105.

unsentimental—is less a statement against the kind of optimistic enthusiasm for untouched wilderness espoused by Ansel Adams, than it is an artistic expression that derives from the same history that inspired his predecessor. As Wallace Stegner noted in his essay on Leopold, the Anglo-American love of Nature, which extends back to Emerson and (especially) Thoreau, has long been “an unbroken double song of love and lamentation...Lamentation is the conscience speaking. Below the energy, enthusiasm, and optimism of our early years—below the Whitman strain—there is always the dark bass of warning, nostalgia, loss, and somewhat bewildered guilt.”¹⁸⁵ It is precisely this double strain that is at play in Adams’s views of the American West. “To see the facts without blinking” was for Adams a deliberate and necessary aesthetic choice, a means for picturing an actual (rather than ideal) landscape.

This three-part essay will thus propose a new interpretation of Robert Adams’s new West photographs, by considering the works’ documentary-style aesthetic (see Introduction for a full definition of this term), as well as his specific compositional choices and repeated subject motifs, as the work of an artist whose philosophies are rooted in American Transcendentalist thought and contemporary environmental writing that was itself informed by this literary, artistic and philosophical tradition. As a means for historically situating the biases that framed early discussions about Adams’s photographs, the essay’s first section will briefly summarize contemporary interpretations of his new West work, which is defined throughout this essay as the entirety of photographs that comprise his three published bodies of work: *The New West* (1974), *denver: A Photographic Survey of the Metropolitan Area* (1977) and *What We Bought 1970-1974* (published 1995). Most of these photographs were produced between 1968-1974.

The second part of this essay will analyze the photographs themselves, focusing less on the significance of singular images than on the aesthetic and thematic consistencies that recur

¹⁸⁵ Wallace Stegner, “The Legacy of Aldo Leopold,” 219.

throughout these bodies of work as a collective whole. This approach to landscape photography, wherein the works' cumulative effect has far greater impact than that of a handful of "masterful" images, is, I would argue, the most useful way to assess Adams's artistic process. From the start of Adams's career, he published his work in book form, scrupulously editing, organizing subsections, and juxtaposing particular images to create the desired effect. Additionally, it is important to consider Adams's new West work within the context of two projects he was producing more or less concurrently with these photographs: *White Churches of the Plains* and *The Architecture and Art of Early Hispanic Colorado*. (Both of these projects were published as books, in 1970 and 1974 respectively, though neither received the same degree of critical and museum attention as did the new West work.) By considering these early photographs of rural, vernacular subjects and motifs found in the Colorado landscape alongside his images of tract houses, suburban development, and strip malls, Adams's larger "love and lamentation" for nature and the pastoral ideal become more apparent. Additionally, there are certain recurring subjects whose presence throughout the new West work calls Adams's distanced "objectivism" into question. Specifically, his minimal (though deliberate) inclusion of figures, who are seen struggling against the man-altered landscape and completely detached from nature, suggests a melancholic longing for the lost pastoral ideal of living in harmony with the natural world. Balancing this "lamentation" is always "love," for nature. To this point, Adams's use of light is significant, serving throughout the work as both a formal, descriptive tool of illumination, as well as a symbolic device that implies a search for personal and spiritual hope amidst an increasingly troubled landscape of ruin and disconnection.

The essay's third and final section will address in greater depth the literary connections to Adams's landscapes, focusing specifically on the writings of Stegner, Abbey, and the Denver-

based poet Thomas Hornsby Ferril. Ferril had less of a national reputation, but was known locally to Adams, who lived in Denver. The poet also wrote the introduction to *White Churches of the Plains*. Roderick Nash's *Wilderness and the American Mind* (first published in 1967) though not a direct influence on Adams, is discussed to more broadly introduce how changing perceptions of wilderness were gaining currency in environmentalist circles during the late 1960s and early 1970s, as a means to historically contextualize the moment in which Adams was working.

Part I: Early Critical Reception

Robert Adams's reputation as an artist was founded on his landscapes of the contemporary American West, specifically, photographs he made between 1968 and 1974. These images would eventually culminate in three publications: *The New West* (1974); *denver: A Photographic Survey of the Metropolitan Area* (1977); and *What We Bought: The New World Scenes from the Denver Metropolitan Area, 1970-1974* (1995).¹⁸⁶ These landscapes were distinguished for being "man-altered," populated by newly built suburban tract houses, real estate development sites, mobile homes, interstate highways, gas stations, strip malls, and the seemingly impenetrable concrete swaths that connect them in the newly expanding and suburbanized Denver metropolitan area.¹⁸⁷ The sixty titled works that comprise *The New West*, which are divided into five sections titled Prairie, Tracts and Mobile Homes, The City, Foothills, and Mountains, focus specifically on the areas along the front wall of the Colorado Rocky Mountains. The ninety-three works in *denver* are divided in a similar fashion, into six sections,

¹⁸⁶ According to Tod Papageorge, in his thoughtful essay on this entire body of work, Adams produced over 5,000 negatives. See Papageorge's essay in the brochure, "Robert Adams What We Bought: The New World" (New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery, 2001), 3-31.

¹⁸⁷ The term "man-altered" was included as the subtitle of the exhibition *New Topographics: Photographs of a Man-Altered Landscape*, a show organized by the George Eastman House which included Adams's photographs in 1975 and in hindsight is considered a watershed in the history of American landscape photography.

titled: Land Surrounded, To Be Developed; Factories, Industrial Land; Our Homes; Trees, Shopping Centers, Commercial Land; Agricultural Land in the Path of Development. As the section titles suggest, the subjects here —the “new” city of Denver and its environs, as defined by Adams as “shopping centers, junky arroyos, and commercial streets”¹⁸⁸—are, generally speaking, shown at more of a distance. They include less evidence of mountain or prairie, and more commercial and residential interiors. *What We Bought* is essentially the entire body of work Adams produced for his 1973 Guggenheim-funded project that, at the time, resulted only in the publication of *denver*. It is also a more extensive exploration of commercial and middle-class residential interiors. The structure of *What We Bought* relies entirely on the sequencing of 193 images, without categorizations and without image titles.

With a few exceptions, most critics and curators who took notice of Robert Adams’s photographs in the late 1960s and early-to-mid 1970s focused almost exclusively on their lack of idealism and romanticism. For some writers, including *New York Times* critic Gene Thornton, the images’ “banality” or “deadness” was perceived as a decidedly negative aspect of the work. In his 1971 review of Adams’s two-person show at MoMA (with Emmet Gowin), Thornton was entirely unenthused by the “lifeless” images. He remarked that of the thirty-one photographs on view, only two images contained people, “so small that you would never notice them unless (like me) you were looking for them.” The problem Thornton had with Adams’s photographs was precisely their “neutrality,” to the degree that he saw Adams as completely “uninterested in composition or technique.” This statement, in addition to revealing Thornton’s ignorance of the way Adams worked, suggests the writer’s bias toward more “classic” works by members of what he called “the Paul-Strand-Point Lobos school” (referring to Ansel Adams and Edward

¹⁸⁸ Robert Adams, introduction to *denver*, unpaginated.

Weston).¹⁸⁹ It should also be noted that Thornton's assertion that Adams's aesthetic was a "rejection of classic approaches to photography" had as much to do with his dislike of John Szarkowski's tastes as it did with Adams's own works.¹⁹⁰ (As an interesting aside, a reader wrote in to the newspaper a few weeks following this review, denouncing Thornton's critical abilities, stating: "It's not the photographers who are lifeless, it's Thornton who is esthetically dead."¹⁹¹)

William Jenkins, who co-curated and wrote the catalogue essay for the important landscape exhibition *New Topographics* (1975), placed Adams in a new generation of landscape photographers that included Lewis Baltz, Stephen Shore, Joe Deal, Bernd and Hilla Becher, Nicholas Nixon, Henry Wessel, Jr., Frank Gohlke, and John Schott. Jenkins proposed that this group of photographers approached landscape photography using a "documentary style" akin to the informational, topographic description characterizing the landscapes of certain nineteenth-century photographers such as Timothy O'Sullivan. In his introductory essay, Jenkins distinctly raises this question of what "documentary" meant and posited it as a central theme of the exhibition. As he states in the concluding sentence of his catalogue essay: "If 'New Topographics' has a central purpose it is simply to postulate, at least for the time being, what it means to make a documentary photograph."¹⁹²

The variety of aesthetic approaches among these photographers, however, did not fit easily into Jenkins's broad stylistic categorization. This issue did not escape the critics. Charles

¹⁸⁹ Gene Thornton, "Lifeless—With or Without People," *New York Times*, January 9, 1972.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid. Thornton also laid the blame on university art departments, and what he perceived as the lack of true originality that results from the institutionalized learning of photography. Thornton's comments were uninformed, in that Adams himself did not have any formal academic training in the medium.

¹⁹¹ Ellsworth Mason, "Letter to the Editor," in *New York Times*, January 23, 1972.

¹⁹² William Jenkins, Introduction, *New Topographics Photographs of a Man-Altered Landscape* (Rochester, NY: International Museum of Photography at George Eastman House, 1975), 7.

Desmarais, in his 1975 review of the exhibition, referred specifically to Adams's photographs as exceptions to the "topographical" idea, and noted that his work was difficult to pigeonhole: in part it is an example of the "topographical," in part a transformation of the mundane into beautiful.¹⁹³ This assessment is an accurate one. Though only twenty of Adams's photographs were included in *New Topographics*, they appear very different in terms of composition and vantage point than the twenty works by Lewis Baltz, for example, who emphasized minimal, repetitious rectilinear forms of industrial warehouses. They also differed from the more conceptual typological grids of coal and salt mine structures featured in the Bechers' work, as well as the color photographs of small city streets and houses in Stephen Shore's work. Even Joe Deal's photographs, which are perhaps closest to Adams's in term of his choice of subject (southwestern suburban housing developments under construction), differ in their conception. Deal, using a 2 ¼ inch camera format, excludes a horizon line, and in all twenty photographs, looks down on his subjects from a distance, compressing the space within the square format to disorient the viewer's sense of conventional perspective [fig. 3.3]. Adams, by contrast, is more of a classicist. He includes the sky in all of his images, a clear horizon line, and he chooses a variety of vantage points and proximities to his subjects [fig. 3.4]. As Britt Salvesen has noted, in her recent re-evaluation of the *New Topographics* exhibition, Robert Adams was never fully comfortable with this early contextualization of his work, taking particular issue with the fact that Jenkins had described the show's concept as being "a post-Ansel Adams endeavor."

¹⁹³ Charles Desmarais, "Topographical Error," *Afterimage* 3:5 (November 1975), 10-11.

Salvesen quotes Adams as saying that he knew the show as “a deception, but one I knew I was participating in.”¹⁹⁴

Though the show’s curatorial premise had its flaws (which Jenkins himself, in retrospect, admitted), the question that Jenkins raised—of defining what, exactly, the term “documentary” and “documentary style” meant at the time—was important.¹⁹⁵ Salvesen again elaborates on this issue, which she notes had a particular significance during the late 1960s and early 1970s when non-photographic “documents”—such as the televised footage of the Vietnam War, and the Watergate tapes—held immense evidentiary power. Additionally, the genre of documentary photography itself inspired new scholarly investigations at this time. William Stott’s *Documentary Expression in 1930s America*, published in 1973, and John Szarkowski’s catalogue essay on Walker Evans, which accompanied the photographer’s 1971 MoMA retrospective, were key examples of this activity. Indeed, Szarkowski introduced Walker Evans to a new generation of photographers, celebrating Evans’s documentary-style aesthetic, which he defined as presenting “the precise and lucid description of a significant fact” but in a manner that was divorced from the utility of a document. Walker Evans himself drew this distinction between “documentary style” photographs, which rely on the veracity of the medium, and actual documentary photographs, such as a police photograph of a crime scene, which served an evidentiary (and hence useful) function.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁴ Britt Salvesen, *New Topographics* (Tucson, Rochester, Göttingen: Center for Creative Photography, The University of Arizona, George Eastman House International Museum of Photography and Film, and Steidl, 2009), 44.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 49. Salvesen quotes Jenkins as stating, in retrospect: “People come to me and think that I understand this because I invented it, and I didn’t really understand it very well then. I think my essay reveals that.”

¹⁹⁶ Evans noted: “art is really useless...Therefore art is never a document, though it certainly can adopt that style.” Salvesen, 15-16.

Szarkowski's affirmation and influence was also crucial for Adams, and contributed to the early perception of his new West work. When the photographer first showed a selection of these photographs to Szarkowski around 1970, he was "naïve" about Szarkowski's stature. Though he had shown his photographs to a few colleagues at Colorado College, they elicited little more than a polite response.¹⁹⁷ "Someone had to tell me if I was crazy or not," Adams noted, and sent letters of inquiry to both Beaumont Newhall at the George Eastman House in Rochester, and Szarkowski at MoMA.¹⁹⁸ Szarkowski eventually agreed to see him. Adams recounts the story of their first meeting with a note of humor. Upon calling up the department's secretary, Adams was asked: "Are you the one who makes those little pictures? I think John likes them...and he'd like to meet you."¹⁹⁹ Their first meeting, which lasted only two hours at most, was spent talking less about photography than about American geography.

Soon after this exchange, Szarkowski purchased four of Adams's photographs for the permanent collection (for twenty-five dollars each)²⁰⁰—an act that gave Adams "enormous confirmation" that what he was doing had serious merit.²⁰¹ Szarkowski's support continued, in quick succession: in 1970 he included Adams's work in a new acquisitions exhibition, and in 1971, featured his photographs in the two-man exhibition at MoMA. He also wrote the introduction to *The New West*, in which he characterized Adams's photographs as landscapes that "eschew[ed] hyperbole [and] theatrical gestures," and provided a new and more genuine way

¹⁹⁷ April M. Watson in conversation with Robert Adams, November 20, 2008.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Chronology, in *To Make It Home*, 168. In recollection, Adams states quite simply that Szarkowski's influence was of tremendous importance to his decision to leave teaching completely and devote himself full time to photography, which he did in 1970.

to think about the human-altered landscape, an alternative to what Szarkowski identified as “the shrill rodomontade of conventional conservation dialectics.”²⁰² In contrast, when Szarkowski wrote of Ansel Adams’s photographs on the occasion of the museum’s 1979 exhibition *Ansel Adams and the West*, he noted: “He is the last of those Romantic artists who have seen the great spaces of the wilderness as a metaphor for freedom and heroic aspirations.”²⁰³ Szarkowski’s assertions about these two photographers thus reinforced the distinction between their aesthetic approach to landscape, rather than framing their visions as deriving from a similar strain of Romantic thought.

Between 1965 and 1974, when Robert Adams was making photographs that would become *The New West*, he was also working on two other series of landscape photographs: views of rural churches along the eastern Colorado plains (*White Churches of the Plains*, published as a book in 1970) and the artifacts and architecture of early Hispanic culture in southern Colorado, published as *Architecture and Art of Early Hispanic Colorado* in 1974. Neither of these projects received the same degree of critical attention as did *The New West*. Though later assessments considered these photographs as either less accomplished pictures, or merely precursors to the more masterful achievement of *The New West* work, the main reason the rural images were not exhibited as art, I would argue, had to do with Adams’s contextualization of the photographs. Both *White Churches* and *Art and Architecture of Early Hispanic Colorado* were conceived as historically based, documentary studies, accompanied by texts, written by Adams, that emphasized the history of settlement, the socio-cultural context for the structures and artifacts,

²⁰² John Szarkowski, introduction to *The New West*, 9.

²⁰³ Andy Grundberg quotes Szarkowski’s wall label for MoMA’s 1979 exhibition *Ansel Adams and the West*. See Grundberg, “Ansel Adams and the Politics of Natural Space,” reprinted in *Crisis of the Real: Writings on Photography Since 1974* (New York: Aperture, 1999), 36.

and architectural descriptions. Adams's understanding of *The New West* work was far more open-ended, particularly at the time he showed it to Szarkowski, when he himself did not quite know what to make of it, or if it had artistic merit.

However, looking more closely at Adams's photographs of new suburban development alongside his pictures of rural vernacular architecture offers an understanding of the ideological linkages between these bodies of work. Considered collectively, Adams's photographs during this period highlight the photographer's broader ideas about the Western landscape as a complex nexus of history, nature, and culture. This conception is not static or unchanging, but rather malleable and transient. These photographs may also be conceived of as depicting, in Romantic terms, a landscape in ruin: in both *White Churches of the Plains* and *The Architecture and Art of Early Hispanic Colorado* ruins appear as remnants of a past way of life, a pastoral ideal of close-knit communities that lived in close connection to the land. In the new West work, the shoddy tract houses, strip malls, cul-de-sacs, and concrete swaths of paved-over land Adams photographs are seen, by contrast, as ruins-in-the-making. The next section of this essay will elaborate on these ideas, and address in greater depth how Adams's ideological concerns about landscape manifest pictorially in the breadth of his photographs during this period.²⁰⁴

Part II: A Landscape in Ruin

When photographing the white churches built by late nineteenth-century Anglo settlers along the eastern plains of Colorado, and the places of worship and religious objects of early Hispanic settlement in southern Colorado, Adams discovered close-knit relationships among artifact, architecture, community, and the land itself. When photographing the architecture and

²⁰⁴ Cultural historian Eric J. Sandeen first proposed the connection between Adams's photographs of Colorado's rural, disappearing vernacular architecture and his new West work. See Sandeen, "Robert Adams and Colorado's Cultural Landscapes. Picturing Tradition and development in the New West," *Buildings & Landscapes: Journal of the Vernacular Architectural Forum* 16:1 (Spring 2009), 97-116.

land associated with new suburban development, however, he emphasized the disconnection of these elements: a severance among people, communities, the architecture and the land that effectively turns its back on both historical precedents and the natural landscape.²⁰⁵ In essence, both the rural and suburban landscapes could be considered pictures of ruins, a motif which has longstanding Romantic associations in nineteenth-century American and European landscape painting.

The writings of John Brinkerhoff Jackson are relevant here to support this point. Jackson's considered engagement with the vernacular American landscape was of great critical importance in shaping a new understanding of the term "landscape" during the post-World War II era. Jackson first gained recognition for the essays he wrote and edited for the periodical *Landscape* between 1951 and 1968, which often focused on commonplace aspects of landscape: fences, roads, strip malls and gas stations. In an essay titled "The Necessity for Ruins" (1980), Jackson emphasized the importance of understanding ruins as part of a vital "interval of neglect" before a landscape once marked by the forms of a bygone era can be restored, or recreated anew. As he wrote: "There has to be...an interim of death or rejection before there can be renewal and reform. The old order has to die before there can be a born-again landscape."²⁰⁶ The interstitial period of ruins, between past and future, would thus allow for artistic and (in Jackson's words) religious rebirth. The entirety of Adams's Colorado landscapes made between 1965-1974 might thus be seen in this context: as a means of personally coming to terms with this "interim period," between past traditions and an unknown future in which historical precedents are tenuous, and at risk of permanently disappearing.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 116.

²⁰⁶ J. B. Jackson, *The Necessity of Ruins and Other Topics* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980), 102.

Ruins were prevalent motifs in nineteenth-century American landscape painting. The work of the English émigré painter, Thomas Cole who arrived in the United States in 1818, serves as a well-known example. Cole's epic five-part painting cycle *The Course of Empire*, of 1833-1836 [figs. 3.5-3.9] features as its final canvas a painting titled *Desolation*, which depicts the classical ruins of a fallen city, dimly illuminated by the waning light of day, devoid of people and in the process of being reclaimed by wilderness [fig. 3.9]. This painting serves as the visual finale to his five-part narrative, whose canvases were titled, in order: *The Savage State*, *The Arcadian or Pastoral State*, *The Consummation of Empire*, *Destruction* and *Desolation*. Cole was deeply disenchanted by the disappearance of untouched wilderness in the face of the nation's increasingly mechanized agricultural practices and industrial expansion during the first half of the nineteenth century. He conceived of *The Course of Empire* as a warning against the dangers of expanding civilization too far away from the pastoral ideal of a harmonious co-existence between man and wilderness, which would result in the complete self-destruction of a gluttonous and materialist society. The ruins in Cole's *Desolation* are very clearly Romantic symbols, which suggest at once the passage of time, the significance of remembering human history as it has impacted the natural environment, and the ultimate triumph of wild nature in its reclamation of natural terrain.

These are concerns Adams addresses directly in *White Churches* and *Art and Architecture*. In both bodies of work, Adams's sympathies are clearly aligned with the pastoral or Arcadian ideal of humankind living in balance with nature in a pre-urban state (as pictured in Cole's second canvas, *The Arcadian or Pastoral State*) [fig. 3.6]. For Adams, this balance derives from the secular and spiritual humility of these early communities and their close ties to the land. Adams does not shy away from articulating these assertions, as is evident in his text for

White Churches. He writes: “To know this landscape is to know those who came to it, both as it called them and as it formed them once they arrived. It is to see their hope...it is to understand their quietness, learned as they bore the isolation, and to respect their practicality, a form of humility. Most of all, it is to know the strength of their faith.”²⁰⁷ His text includes references to the Old Testament and Psalm 19, which are inserted amidst historical descriptions of the buildings to amplify the significance of faith and religion in the conception of these structures and landscape.²⁰⁸ Though his *White Churches* photographs do not depict ruined structures, the project itself was clearly conceived with preservationist sympathies: as he notes in his preface, these structures “are disappearing too rapidly.”²⁰⁹ Ruins are, however, pictured in *Architecture and Art of Early Hispanic Colorado*: the walls of an adobe convent built around 1870, the walls of a trading post and fort near La Garita from 1858, and an abandoned storage building made of cottonwood timbers and adobe are all included in Adams’s study of these disappearing vernacular forms [figs. 3.10-3.11]. In his text for this book, Adams makes direct correlations between the ideas of historical preservation and personal salvation. He begins his essay with the statement “There is no saving this landscape,”²¹⁰ and concludes by calling for (albeit with a sense

²⁰⁷ Robert Adams, *White Churches of the Plains* (Boulder: Colorado Associated University Press, 1970), unpaginated.

²⁰⁸ Adams quotes Ezekiel 3:22-23: “And the hand of the Lord was there upon me; and he said unto me, Arise, go forth into the plain, and I will there talk with thee. Then I arose, and went forth into the plain: and, behold, the glory of the Lord stood there.” At the end of his introduction, Adams notes that upon looking at the Bibles marked in one remaining church, Psalm 19 was marked: “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard. Their line is gone out through the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them hath he set a tabernacle for the sun, Which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, and rejoiceth as a strong man to run a race. His going forth is for the end of the heaven, and his circuit unto the ends of it: and there is nothing hid from the heat thereof.” Adams, preface to *White Churches of the Plains*, unpaginated.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ Robert Adams, *The Architecture and Art of Early Hispanic Colorado*, 223.

of helplessness) the preservation of these structures, while lamenting the lack of appreciation for the subjects' historical and cultural value.

Throughout *White Churches of the Plains* and *The Architecture and Art of Early Hispanic Colorado*, Adams repeatedly shows both sacred and secular forms (churches, cemeteries, crosses, and Santos) inhabiting the same natural landscape [figs. 3.12-3.14]. These subjects are deeply invested, both culturally and symbolically, with notions of faith, religion, mortality, and salvation. His desire to record these disappearing vernacular forms and the pastoral ideal they represent goes beyond that of a cultural historian, however. Adams clearly assigns to these subjects and these landscapes a belief in their capacity to effect spiritual transcendence. His final paragraph in *Architecture and Art* affirms this notion. As he writes: "But what was the wealth of people living by undisturbed mountains and prairies? If we can begin accurately to assess it, we may hope, in grace, to save ourselves."²¹¹

The question then arises: to save ourselves from what, exactly? If the vestiges and ruins of a past pastoral ideal are symbolized by these rural vernacular landscapes, what do the tract houses, strip malls, and housing developments of the new West symbolize? For Adams, they connote the opposite: mass-produced structures, assembled from non-native materials that obscure, if they do not completely obliterate, a connection to the natural surroundings. In these fragmented, architectural forms, often shown incomplete and in the process of being constructed, there is no sense of wholeness, history, or continuity with the past [figs. 3.16-3.17]. References to religious architecture in *The New West*, are minimal: there is one image of a cemetery, and there are precisely two photographs of churches, one of which depicts a Sunday School gathering at a church in a new tract. This one photograph, in fact, includes more human figures gathered

²¹¹ Ibid., 225.

together than in any of the other photographs in *The New West* combined [fig. 3.15]. In *denver* and *What We Bought*, there are virtually no images of churches, cemeteries, or large groups of people gathered together. Rather, people are depicted in increasingly alienated surroundings, suggesting, perhaps, that as Adams continued to produce the work and organize it into books, he became progressively pessimistic about the possibilities for finding spiritual and communal connections within this landscape.

Indeed, the limited inclusion of people in the new suburban environment is a salient characteristic of the new West work: people appear in less than one-fourth of the total published images from *The New West*, *denver*, and *What We Bought*. The overwhelming scarcity of human figures amidst the strip malls, gas stations, suburban neighborhoods and trailer homes suggests the aggressive and alienating aspects of this way of living, disconnected from nature. This dearth of humanity has prompted one recent interpretation by Walead Beshty to read Adams's photographs as being post-apocalyptic in feel, akin to the settings of George Romero's zombie-themed horror films of the early 1970s.²¹² Though such horror films were certainly not a direct influence on Adams (and Beshty's highly selective choice of imagery for making his argument is misleading), the associations between "apocalypse" and "revelation" are interesting to consider: the etymological roots of the word "apocalypse" mean "uncovering," as in a disclosure of knowledge. In Christian terms these concepts are closely intertwined.

²¹² In his essay, Beshty compares selected examples of Adams's work (along with photographs from others associated with *New Topographics*) with the zombie-themed horror films of George Romero. Beshty suggests that both forms of visual culture may be interpreted within the same context of a marked shift in the American psyche during the early 1970s, which "addressed the power of the image as it usurped the power of place." While this is an interesting interpretation, as it takes into account the historical circumstances of the early 1970s as impacting a particular aesthetic shift in visual culture, Beshty's reading ignores the very significant presence of those people who do appear in these photographs (he in fact selects only the images that do not have them for his discussion, which is misleading). Walead Beshty, "Photography, Cinema, and the Post-apocalyptic Ruin," *Influence* 1 (2003), 61.

When figures do appear in Adams's photographs, their minimal presence within the suburban landscape assumes a palpable significance. Men, women and children walk alongside seemingly busy roads, either alone or in pairs. One such image, which was included in *The New West*, depicts an elderly woman carrying a shopping bag across a gas station lot [fig. 3.18]. Visible behind her is a supermarket and parking lot full of cars, and in front of her is an expanse of pavement. Adams has photographed her just as she has walked past the station's gas pumps. Her stern expression implies a sense of resignation to this landscape, which was designed to neither accommodate nor encourage pedestrians. Other photographs depict people eating alone in restaurants, completely removed from the natural landscape. In one two-page spread in *What We Bought*, Adams photographed a young woman, seated alone in a diner booth, holding a cup of coffee and reading a book [fig. 3.19]. Adams composes the square frame of the image such that her presence assumes as much pictorial space as the empty seat opposite her. This bifurcation is emphasized by a vertical post, which visually divides the image at its center. In the second image, a man is shown seated alone in what appears to be an eating area or small cafeteria in a department store [fig. 3.20]. He is seen at a distance, barely discernible behind an array of empty tables and chairs that consume the image's foreground. Adams also composes the frame such that the long tubes of fluorescent lighting mounted on the store's ceiling are given a prominent presence within the image. The repeated, linear luminescence of these lights irradiates the sterile interior. Here, the human subject, completely removed from nature, is living far from the ideal articulated by Thoreau when he spoke in *Walden* of the human need for wilderness as a palliative for modern life. As he wrote: "we need the tonic of wildness... We must be refreshed by the sight of inexhaustible vigor, vast and Titanic features, the sea-coast with its wrecks, the wilderness with its living and decaying tress, the thunder cloud, and the rain that lasts three weeks and

produces freshets.”²¹³ As if to emphasize the irony of this kind of removal, Adams includes in *What We Bought* several images of decorative landscape reproductions available for sale, suggesting that the natural landscape from which we are separated is now being re-sold to us as cheap, mass reproduced commodities [fig. 3.21].

One of Adams’s most iconic photographs from *The New West* clearly exemplifies the notion of suburban isolation, particularly as it may have resonated for many middle-class women. In this image, he focuses on a suburban brick house, looking in from the outside [fig. 3.22]. Visible through the picture window is the dark silhouette of a female figure. There is, as in Adams’s other photographs that feature solitary figures, a consistent geometric rigor in this composition. Adams crops the modest rectangular house such that it appears as an imposing barrier, rigidly defined by the seemingly implacable vertical and horizontal elements of door, window, railing, brick and mortar. The carefully manicured lawn and neat sidewalk fills the bottom third of the picture plane, while the upper third contains a cloudless sky, whose crisp light is the only thing allowed to penetrate the house interior. The solitary female figure appears as the only sign of life in an otherwise empty space. Here, Adams is metaphorically framing human isolation from nature, using the architectural forms of these interior spaces to convey disconnection, not simply from the land, but also from a larger community.

The fact that Adams depicts an isolated female figure, seen in silhouette and hence without a sense of the woman’s distinct facial features has gendered implications as well. The containment implied in Adams’s photograph resonates with the assertions made by Betty Friedan in her book *The Feminine Mystique* (1963). As noted in Chapter Two, Friedan made direct correlations between suburban lifestyles and the psychological and emotional alienation felt by

²¹³ Quoted in *American Wilderness: A New History*, Michael Lewis, ed. (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 80.

many women during the post-World War II period, particularly those of the white, educated, middle and upper-middle classes to which Friedan herself belonged. Friedan spoke directly about what she perceived to be the stifling characteristics of suburban living for these women. This feeling resulted from a lifestyle that involved days filled with “the trivia of housewifery” while men, particularly in the bedroom suburbs built in close proximity to cities, commuted every day to work, leaving their wives at home to care for children and to do housework. Loneliness also arose when suburban women were either unable to find personal sanctuary within the standard architectural plans of suburban houses, or were “afraid to be alone.” As Friedan wrote: “the American housewife’s dilemma is that she does not have the privacy to follow real interests of her own, but even if she had more time and space to herself, she would not know what to do with it.” Further, as Friedan noted, women’s roles as suburban housewives, glorified by the larger culture as being more important than that of their husbands, served as an illusion meant to deflect the reality that women were not paid for child rearing and housework. Though “the feminine mystique” implied “togetherness” with children and husbands, as a cultural construct it ultimately served to keep women separated from participating in the world outside their homes. As Friedan wrote: “Togetherness was a poor substitute for equality; the glorification of women’s role was a poor substitute for free participation in the world as an individual.”²¹⁴

The formal, architectural containment of the female figure in Adams’s photograph may be read in this context. Though the woman is seen alone in this suburban space, the mood is one of isolation and alienation rather than solitude or metaphysical retreat, primarily because Adams places the viewer outside the home, looking in through the picture window. There is an uneasy feeling that we are voyeuristically invading personal privacy; and yet, the uncurtained picture window affords no such privacy for this female figure. The window is itself significant: it was a

²¹⁴ Friedan., 238.

frequent architectural feature in plans for post-World War II suburban homes, employed by architects and homebuilders as an inexpensive means to “frame” a view of the natural world and allow the maximum amount of light into the interior of a home.²¹⁵ As criticism of the suburban lifestyle arose during the latter half of the 1950s, the picture window was seen by some as ubiquitous and hence monotonous, providing no privacy for its inhabitants. This architectural feature became a metaphor for the perceived dysfunction of suburbia, as exemplified in the title of John Keats’ 1957 novel, *The Crack in the Picture Window*. The window’s dystopic significance might be seen in a similar metaphoric capacity in Adams’s photograph. This woman is at once contained within the architectural conformity of suburbia, and on view for the outside world from which she is distinctly separated. Seen as a silhouette, which imparts a sense of impersonality, she is more readily seen as a “type” rather than as an individual. “The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation,” wrote Thoreau in one of his most famous quotes from *Walden*; a sentiment that, with adjustments for gender, could well apply to the female figure in Adams’s photograph.²¹⁶

Of the images that do include a minimal human presence, there are a considerable number which feature children. Their recurring presence suggests that their function is as much metaphoric as literal, with Adams deliberately evoking an enduring Romantic association

²¹⁵ See John Archer, David Brooks, David Brueggemann, and Andrew Blauvelt, *Worlds Away: New Suburban Landscapes* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 2008), 284. For an extended discussion of the evolution of the picture window and its symbolic relationship with suburbia, see Rosalynn Baxandall and Elizabeth Ewen, *Picture Windows: How Suburbs Happened* (New York: Basic Books, 2001).

²¹⁶ The full quote, which derives from “Economy,” the first section of *Walden*, reads: “The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation. What is called resignation is confirmed desperation. From the desperate city you go into the desperate country, and have to console yourself with the bravery of minks and muskrats. A stereotyped but unconscious despair is concealed even under what are called the games and amusements of mankind. There is no play in them, for this comes after work. But it is a characteristic of wisdom not to do desperate things.” Henry David Thoreau, *Walden, or Life in the Woods* (1854). Accessible online as a portable document file published by Jim Manis, ed., *Walden, or Life in the Woods* (Hazelton, PA: Pennsylvania State University, 2006), 9. <http://www2.hn.psu.edu/faculty/jmanis/thoreau/thoreau-walden6x9.pdf>. Viewed July 20, 2013.

between children and nature in order to demonstrate the separation of one from the other in the wake of suburban expansion. Children are almost always shown playing in manmade, inhospitable surroundings. In one image, two children sit on a steep concrete incline that is alarmingly close to a strip of a highway [fig. 3.23]. Children are shown alone in cul-de-sacs or kneeling alongside busy streets, with no safe place to ride their bikes. Very young children are pictured alone outside, strapped into devices that contain their movement or, in one image, ensconced and transfixed by a television set [figs. 3.24, 3.25]. Often, their absence from the outdoors is reinforced by the imagery of empty backyard play equipment [fig. 3.26]. One image in *denver* depicts a child standing on a loading dock [fig. 3.27]. The picture is composed such that the entire frame is consumed by the industrial cement structure. The child, who appears as a small presence against this backdrop, looks back at the photographer. Adams titles the image “child with nothing to do, in the back of a shopping center,” a commentary that reveals his own subjective take on the situation and suggests his disdain for the lack of opportunities for the child to engage with more natural surroundings. Like the girl in stockinged feet who walks on pavement amidst trailer homes as described in the chapter’s opening comparison, this child appears aggressively removed from nature—here to the degree that there is in fact no reference to the land whatsoever. In these images of children, the “neutrality” of Adams’s vision is especially suspect—and his Romantic concern for humanity is readily apparent.²¹⁷

Though Adams’s deep disenchantment with the imbalanced state of human-nature interactions pervades the three bodies of work that collectively constitute the new West, there is also a sense of hope, albeit a cautious one. For Adams, this feeling propels him to search the landscape of the new West in post-World War II America for some sign of transcendent

²¹⁷ This trope of picturing children to evoke sympathy aligns Adams with the work of Dorothea Lange, whom he greatly admired.

connection to nature. His main aesthetic tool for conveying this notion of revelation is light. If “form,” in Adams’s mind, connects all people to the land, to one another, and to history, then “light” is both a universal constant and that which illuminates, irradiates, reveals, affirms, and exposes the landscape. In *The New West*, Adams states his concerns directly: “The subject of these pictures is, in this sense, not tract homes or freeways but the source of all Form, light.”²¹⁸ When Adams’s work was first exhibited in 1971 at MoMA, his use of light was often cited as the most salient aspect of the photographs. As fellow photographer Tod Papageorge notes, when he first saw Adams’s photographs he was struck more by the photographs’ “pitiless light, virtually combusting in the thin Colorado air,” than the suburban subject matter itself.²¹⁹

Most of the images in *The New West* were made during undiluted daylight. In several of these photographs, the light serves to harden the repetitive white geometry of tract houses that reflect it, while simultaneously reinforcing the silvery brilliance of the cumulus-filled sky²²⁰ [fig. 3.28]. This intense midday sun also creates crisp, discernible shadows that separate these structures from the land, reinforcing a sense of their ephemeral, even flimsy, construction. This effect is readily apparent in one image of an angled side view of a newly built suburban dwelling that sits plinth-like, loosely moored to the earth, atop a recently bulldozed lot, casting a dark shadow [fig. 3.29]. The precise tonal geometry of the foreground elements contrast with the rugged irregularity of the mountain range in the distance, further emphasizing the structures’ mass-produced, unnatural forms. There are also several images that juxtapose the contained, artificial luminescence emanating from subjects such as gas stations, motels, or house interiors as

²¹⁸ Robert Adams, introduction to *The New West*, 12.

²¹⁹ Tod Papageorge notes: “After all, sprawl has never been a difficult problem to identify and condemn, particularly in the antiestablishment sixties.” See Papageorge, “What We Bought,” 4.

²²⁰ Adams speaks of this sky as having the power to transform, “grotesque, inhuman things into mysteries worthy of attention.” Robert Adams, *Landscape: Theory*, 10.

seen from the outside, with a more diffuse and expansive natural light. This is particularly evident in Adams's image of a gas station near Pike's Peak, in which Adams includes the mountains and waning natural light as a backdrop for the small building, its gas pumps and fluorescent lights [fig. 3.30]. A large, well-lit sign bears the truncated name "Frontier," which serves as an ironic reference to a more mythologized notion of the past. In images such as this, the human-made and natural worlds are brought together, albeit tempered by melancholic irony.

Adams's use of light also changes throughout the trilogy of the new West work, from *The New West*, through *denver* and *What We Bought*. In *The New West*, he retains a position that is, ultimately, a hopeful one, as he writes: "even as we see the harm of our work and determine to correct it, we also see that nothing *can*, in the last analysis, intrude. Nothing permanently diminishes the affirmation of the sun."²²¹ This mood changes in *denver*. Here, for Adams, light only "sometimes still works an alchemy."²²² The pellucid quality of daylight so readily apparent in *The New West* is far less visible, perhaps indeed a result of increased pollution: according to one article in the *New York Times*, air pollution in Denver had gotten so bad, that by 1976, transportation planners were proposing a subway system to combat the city's growing traffic congestion and commensurately poor air quality.²²³ In *What We Bought*, Adams includes far more images of domestic and retail that are almost exclusively illuminated by artificial sources. *What We Bought* contains lengthier passages of images made in store, factory, and office

²²¹ Robert Adams, introduction to *The New West*, 12.

²²² Robert Adams, introduction to *denver*, unpaginated.

²²³ See Ralph Blumenthal, "Denver Seeks U. S. Aid for a Transit System," *New York Times*, April 20, 1976. To an important extent, however, this had a lot to do with the poorer reproduction quality of this book, something Adams himself regrets. The twilight views, for example, seem far less nuanced in the book than the prints themselves appear.

interiors, depicting shelves of packaged consumables and distracted customers who rarely interact with one another.

Another significant consideration when assessing the entirety of Adams's oeuvre during this period is its cumulative effect. Considering *The New West*, *denver*, and *What We Bought* as a trilogy, as Tod Papageorge has suggested, offers a fruitful means for understanding the photographs.²²⁴ The term "trilogy" prompts not only a literary connotation that is particularly apropos for Adams, who earned a PhD in English literature, but it also suggests that while there are certain aesthetic consistencies throughout the oeuvre, there are also distinct shifts in subject matter, and differences in the way the work is organized and titled when progressing chronologically by date of publication. These distinctions construct a narrative arc, shaping a "story" about the new American West of the post-World War II era that begins on a far more hopeful note than it ends. It could thus be argued that Adams's progression from *The New West* to *What We Bought* is a narrative cycle akin to Thomas Cole's *The Course of Empire*. Where Cole used the genre of landscape to warn against the deleterious effects of America's early industrialism on the pastoral ideal in the first part of the nineteenth century, Adams pictures landscape to call attention to the impact that late capitalist materialism has had on people and their increasing (dis)connection from the natural environment. For Adams, however, there is no guarantee of a reclamation by wilderness by the end of his series. Rather, his suburban landscapes remain haunted by the feeling that finding one's physical and spiritual connection to these places in a rapidly changing, man-altered landscape, is next to impossible. Unlike his explorations of disappearing rural vernacular architecture and communities in the Colorado landscape—places in which Adams finds a fulfilling, harmonious way of life—Adams's

²²⁴ Papageorge, "What We Bought," reprinted in *Core Curriculum: Writings on Photography* by Tod Papageorge (New York: Aperture, 2011), 144.

suburban pictures suggest little to none of this pastoral ideal. This human condition we now find ourselves in is “what we bought,” without paying much attention, and we brought it upon ourselves. Significantly, he includes himself in that melancholic human equation: the final image in this publication is a view of his own front door [fig. 3.31].²²⁵

Though his photographs themselves are decidedly unsentimental visions of the new American West, Adams’s impetus for making them is grounded in a philosophical and spiritual quest that has its roots in nineteenth-century American Romanticism and Transcendental thought. Adams’s ideas about landscape are as much connected to the long American literary tradition of writing about man and the wilderness as they are to a history of painting or photography, histories with which he was only cursorily aware at the time he began to make photographs. Though an in-depth study of these literary connections goes beyond the scope of this chapter, a brief overview that includes a few key figures admired by Adams helps to situate his photographs of the new West within the broader literary and environmental context of the post-World War II period.

Part III: Robert Adams and the Idea of Wilderness

In his 1981 collection of essays on *Beauty in Photography*, Robert Adams wrote:

Photographs that suggest an Arcadian landscape are recognizable from the city dweller’s perspective as partial visions, and they make us uneasy. We feel our defenselessness against what we will encounter on the street. How can Sequoia National Park save us from the concrete-and-glass brutalities of New York City? The answer is, in simple emotional terms at least, that they cannot; to be reminded of the trees makes city streets seem worse.²²⁶

²²⁵ My thanks to Joshua Chuang for providing this information.

²²⁶ Robert Adams, *Beauty in Photography: Essays in Defense of Traditional Values*, 104-105.

As these words suggest, Adams firmly believed that there was a strong, albeit melancholic, connection between idealized views of nature (such as those of Ansel Adams, to whom he is referring when he writes about Sequoia National Park) and the “brutalities” of urban existence. Adams distinguishes between the “city dweller’s perspective” and an “Arcadian landscape,” a bifurcation that has an established tradition in American literary and environmental conceptions of the landscape. This notion, that one’s definition and understanding of wilderness and of civilization were codependent, was introduced in an important publication by the historian Roderick Nash in 1967, titled *Wilderness and the American Mind*. In this book, Nash argued that the American wilderness should more accurately be studied as a state of mind rather than an actual place. Though Adams himself may not have been familiar with the book at the time he was photographing in and around Denver, its salient themes are worth summarizing. It appeared at a significant historical moment during the late 1960s, at a time when the complexities of defining wilderness, and increased efforts to preserve undeveloped land and conserve natural resources, were becoming a mainstream cultural concern.

In his study, Nash emphasized the subjective nature of “wilderness” as a concept, analyzing “not so much what wilderness is but what men *think* it is,” from its European roots to the (then) present day. Noting that the term is highly subjective—“one man’s wilderness may be another’s roadside picnic”²²⁷—Nash also argued that over the course of history, our understanding and definitions of wilderness have changed radically. Where, for example, the nineteenth-century American frontiersmen saw wild country as a dangerous and inhospitable place that needed to be conquered, Americans born two generations later—who were further removed from this direct experience of undeveloped land—began to assign to ethical and

²²⁷ Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1967), 1.

aesthetic values to wilderness. Nash discussed key historical figures who shaped debates over the meaning and value of wilderness in the late-nineteenth and twentieth centuries, including Henry David Thoreau, believed by many to be the first to articulate the need to understand “wildness” and culture as necessarily connected.²²⁸ Nash also discusses John Muir and Gifford Pinchot (1865-1946) whose preservationist versus conservationist viewpoints (respectively) reflect the basic tension that underscored (and continues to inform) debates over the relationship between protected wilderness and the needs of human civilization.²²⁹ Aldo Leopold is also discussed, a man who synthesized the logic of science and the more romantic sentiments of Muir’s position to forge a new understanding of wilderness preservation as necessary for developing an ecological conscience and land ethic. Nash ended his 1967 edition with a chapter titled “Decisions for Permanence,” which discussed the then-new Wilderness Act of 1964, and the conundrum that tourism presented to areas preserved from development. In his second edition (1973) Nash extended that discussion to address debates over building dams in the Grand Canyon.

Nash’s fourth edition, though not published until 2001, includes a chapter titled “Toward a Philosophy of Wilderness,” that elaborates on the key concepts that underscored modern wilderness philosophy. After two world wars, the invention of the atomic bomb, and Freud’s assertion that people were actually happier living in more unrepressed states, civilization seemed far less appealing than it had a century prior. Wilderness gained considerable allure in the 1960s,

²²⁸ Max Oelschlaeger argues this point in his book, noting that Thoreau, more than Emerson, was critical to “the birth of a distinctively American idea of wilderness” by emphasizing “an organic connection between Homo sapiens and nature.” See Oelschlaeger, *The Idea of Wilderness*, 133.

²²⁹ Where conservationists believed in conserving nature wisely so that it might be used for sustainable natural resources, preservationists sought to prohibit any use of protected land whatsoever. The disagreements between preservationist and Sierra Club founder John Muir and the conservationist forester Pinchot culminated in the Hetch Hetchy Reservoir debate, a national controversy over the construction of a dam in the Hetch Hetchy Valley in Yosemite National Park to supply water and power to the city of San Francisco. The controversy ended with the passage of the Raker Act in 1913, which authorized construction of the O’Shaughnessy Dam which then created the Hetch Hetchy Reservoir, completed in 1923.

when baby-boomers came of age and began to question and protest against the values established by their parents' generation. In their repudiation of technology, industry, and profit as progress—the entities that historically had depleted wilderness—they upheld nature as a way of resisting the established order.

Coinciding with this countercultural unrest, and in many ways growing out of it, was the nascent environmental movement, marked by such influential publications as Rachel Carson's 1962 book *Silent Spring*, which discussed with alarming detail the environmental cost of pesticides such as DDT. Several key laws were also passed in the 1960s and early 1970s to protect natural resources and the environment, including: the Clean Air Act of 1963 (extended in 1970), the Wilderness Act of 1964, the Land and Water Conservation Fund and the Water Quality Control Acts of 1965, the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, among several others. Agencies such as Friends of the Earth (founded 1969), and the Environmental Protection Agency (founded 1970) were formed, and the first Earth Day was established in 1970, fueled considerably by the environmental degradation caused by the 1969 Santa Barbara oil spill which had polluted the California coastline and incited heated calls for reforming the energy industry. By the 1970s, Nash noted, words such as ecology and environment had attained popular currency. It is no surprise that Ansel Adams also became a household name by the end of the 1970s, as his photographs of an ideal Western wilderness of national parks became known well beyond the parameters of a more limited art world. The market for Ansel Adams's photographs rose exponentially in the first half of the decade: in 1970, he garnered \$150 per print; by 1975, the price had risen to \$800. By 1975, faced with a backlog of 3,000 requests, he stopped taking individual print orders completely, and by 1979, he was hailed as a "master" when he appeared on the cover of *Time* magazine.

One of Nash's key points is the particularly American value placed on wilderness of the West as a fundamental and vital component of national identity. This idea derives from Frederick Jackson Turner's famous "frontier thesis," of the 1890s, which postulated that the sacred American virtues of individualism and independence were defined through one's contact with wilderness. Turner's ideas resonated in the writings of one of the West's most eloquent environmental writers, Wallace Stegner, who upheld the notion that losing contact with the wilderness meant losing something of one's American identity. Nash quotes Stegner as stating: "Something will have gone out of us as a people if ever we let the remaining wilderness be destroyed."²³⁰ Stegner furthered the land ethic philosophies of Aldo Leopold and, before him, Henry David Thoreau, who identified the direct experience of wilderness as a necessary component of enlightened civilization.

Stegner also associated wilderness with a "geography of hope," as "a means of reassuring ourselves of our sanity as creatures."²³¹ Robert Adams echoes Stegner's idea in his introduction to *The New West*, when he states: "we need to see the whole geography, natural and man-made, to experience a peace; all land, no matter what has happened to it, has over it a grace, an absolute persistent beauty."²³² Stegner, who was himself troubled by the rapid transformation of the West, also eschewed mythologizing tendencies, writing about the West as a realist, and presenting it as a complex nexus of history, geography, biology, and the mundane activities of its residents. In Stegner's 1972 novel *Angle of Repose*, which won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction that year, disconnection—of people from one another, from history, and from the land—operates as a

²³⁰ Nash, 261.

²³¹ This phrase derives from Stegner's "Wilderness Letter," written to the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission in December 1960, and subsequently in his "Wilderness Idea," in *The Sounds of Mountain Water* (1969).

²³² Robert Adams, introduction to *The New West*, 12.

central theme. This same reluctance to mythologize, as I have argued elsewhere, informs Adams's new West photographs as well.

In the post-World War II period, suburban and industrial development posed one of the greatest threats to wide open natural spaces, particularly in the West. Denver experienced rapid and tremendous growth during this time, increasing its population by 700,000 between 1960 and 1980, from a starting point of approximately 913,832 in 1960.²³³ One newspaper article noted that, in 1970, Colorado was the sixth fastest growing state in the last decade, with a 25.2 percent population increase that brought with it suburban shopping centers, subdivisions, and "the urban ills [Coloradans] came West to escape."²³⁴ The article's author points to the "onset of urban woes" facing the booming Denver metropolis, detailing the city's efforts to control air pollution, reduce crime, traffic congestion, and deal with unsustainable natural resources in the wake of a suburban population boom. He ends with a wistful sentence about Denver's irrevocably changed landscape: "At night, in a sleeping bag as the cold wind cuts through the spruce trees, the astounding stars press down from the Milky Way overhead. The bright glow over the ridgeline to the east is not the rising moon. It is Denver."²³⁵ The rapidity with which the city's expansion transformed the natural landscape for those who had experienced it firsthand was extremely disturbing.

Robert Adams, whose family had moved to Denver from Wisconsin in 1952, when he was fifteen, was certainly troubled as he watched the undeveloped landscape that had in many

²³³ Stephen J. Leonard and Thomas J. Noel, *Denver: Mining Camp to Metropolis* (Niwot, CO: University Press of Colorado, 1990), 408. More specifically, the authors note that between 1940 and 1950, the metropolitan population jumped from 384,372 to 563,832, increasing by more than 350,000 in the 1950s, and between 1960 and 1980, by another 700,000.

²³⁴ Anthony Ripley, "Colorado is Booming and Worried About It," *New York Times*, September 8, 1970.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, 38.

ways shaped his philosophical and spiritual outlook as a young man disappear.²³⁶ During summers as an adolescent, Adams spent a great deal of time outdoors, working as a boys' camp counselor, for the U. S. Forest Service, and as a member of a trail crew in, respectively, Rocky Mountain National Park, Telluride, Colorado, and Glacier National Park, Montana.²³⁷ His direct experience of the Western wilderness—recalled in his letter to Ansel Adams, quoted earlier—was fundamental to shaping his perceptions of its importance. As he pursued a doctorate in English literature at the University of Southern California (eventually earning a PhD in 1965) and began teaching at Colorado College, Adams developed a kinship with Western writers who shared these sentiments, often quoting them in his own writings. In addition to Stegner, two such men were Thomas Hornsby Ferril (1896-1988), a Denver-based poet and writer who wrote the introduction to Adams's *White Churches of the Plains*, and Edward Abbey (1927-1989), Stegner's student and, in Adams's estimation, the "Thoreau of the West."²³⁸ The words of these writers resonate not only with Adams's ideas of wilderness, and his mourning at its rapid disappearance, but also with certain thematic and aesthetic aspects of the photographs themselves: specifically, Adams's focus on children as romantic symbols of innocence in jeopardy and his interest in the history and culture of a landscape in transition. Both of these themes recur in Ferril's writing. In addition, Adams's emphasis on the harsh brilliance of the Western light as a source of both cohesion and truth compares directly with Abbey's descriptions of the desert.

²³⁶ The move, secured by his father's new employment, came about in part in an effort to assuage Adams's poor health: as a child, he suffered both from polio and severe asthma, triggered by allergies so intense they forced him to miss extended periods of school. Moving from Wisconsin, where the family had lived since 1947 (after relocating from New Jersey, Adams's birthplace), Adams felt at first a sense of desolation—a sentiment that would, eventually, dissipate as Adams experienced the natural, seasonal cycles of the area where "hundreds of wonderful things did happen." Adams, *To Make It Home: Photographs of the American West*, 166.

²³⁷ Ibid., 166.

²³⁸ April M. Watson in conversation with Robert Adams, November 20, 2008.

Thomas Hornsby Ferril was a Denver native, born in the city in the last decade of the nineteenth century. When he wrote the brief introduction to Adams's *White Churches of the Plains*, he was in his seventies, having served as a regular contributor to *Harper's* magazine during the 1940 and 1950s and as co-editor of the *Rocky Mountain Herald* (from 1939-1972). (He was later named Poet Laureate for the state of Colorado, in 1979.) Ferril was among those who, given his birth date in 1896, bore witness to the city's unprecedented population boom throughout the twentieth century, and was angered in particular by the rapidity with which its connection to history was disappearing. In his introduction to Adams's book, he noted in his concluding paragraph: "Sad and wicked to me is this ruthless bulldozing into oblivion of so much of America's architectural past," he wrote though he was grateful for the fact that "what they once looked like and stood for" would be preserved in the book.²³⁹

Like his contemporary Wallace Stegner, Ferril wove history into his writing as being vital for understanding the present of the suburbanized, increasingly ahistorical West. His poem "Waltz Against the Mountains," excerpted here, demonstrates this concern:

I'm only half as old as the city is.
I'm younger than an old box-elder tree;
I'm hardly older than the old cathedrals.
Yet I remember primroses and yucca
Out there where all these houses are tonight.
We children gathered primroses and yucca,
We gathered sand lilies and cactus blossoms.

But there's hardly a child in all the sleeping children
From here to where we think the stars begin
Who sleeps in a room where a child, his father, slumbered.²⁴⁰

²³⁹ Thomas Hornsby Ferril, introduction to *White Churches of the Plains*.

²⁴⁰ Thomas Hornsby Ferril, "Waltz Against the Mountains," in *Thomas Hornsby Ferril and the American West*, Robert C. Baron, Stephen J. Leonard, and Thomas J. Noel, editors. (Boulder and Golden, CO.: Fulcrum Publishing and the Center of the American West, University of Colorado Boulder, 1996), 124.

Ferril here measures his own age against both the elements of the natural landscape that endure (the “old box-elder tree”) and those that have disappeared in the wake of suburban expansion (the “primroses and yucca out there where all these houses are tonight”). As in this poem, children figure prominently in Ferril’s writing, as both symbols of an uncertain future and reminders of a different way of living in the past. Between past and future is a discontinuity, effected in part by new, suburban living patterns.

In his poem, “The Prairie Melts,” Ferril’s narrator imagines a child in the future, returning to a spot on “this prairie where I stand,” and stating:

I am not lost.

They told me of this prairie:
This is the prairie where they used to come
To watch the lilies and to watch the falcons.²⁴¹

The tone of this poem is hopeful, imagining as he does the endurance of historical memory as symbolized by the image of a child. His poem “Beyond What Ranges?” is less certain. Here, Ferril also invokes the image of a child, though in a much darker scenario.

Ferril asks in the opening stanzas:

Tell me, beyond what ranges of the reasonable will
Does faring of a city quest?

I ask you this, Denver, Colorado.
Lip of the bulldozer against the skull,
Churning the dead to furrows of new exile,
Numb as the pistons when then diesels cool
And the Steel crane nods
A dragline sag
Down the sandpit pools of evening.²⁴²

²⁴¹ Ferril, “Waltz Against the Mountains,” in *Thomas Hornsby Ferril and the American West*, 102.

²⁴² Ferril, “Beyond What Ranges?,” in *Thomas Hornsby Ferril and the American West*, 6.

And in the poem's final stanza, he writes:

*They say a child was drowned today in a sandpit.
Who was the child?
Where did her people come from?*²⁴³

In this poem, Ferril evokes the image of the child as the innocent victim of a hostile and dangerous landscape. The perils of wild country do not cause her death, but rather the “bulldozed” terrain of “Denver, Colorado” as responsible. The child’s fate is all the more tragic for her anonymity: “who was this child?” She thus becomes a metaphor for human loss and disconnection: from the land, from community, from history.

These same notions resonate in Adams’s photographs of children: the boy playing on the loading dock, the girl in stockinged feet, the children left alone and unattended on the doorstep, or playing precipitously on a concrete highway embankment [figs. 3.23-3.27]. Though he professes to “see the facts without blinking,” Adams’s photographs are colored by such metaphoric associations, and the same ideas that are evoked in Ferril’s poems. The result of laying ruin to the landscape is not simply a disconnection from nature, but also a separation from community and history. Adams himself articulates these ideas in his introduction to *What We Bought*. Looking back to his pictures of Denver in the early 1970s, Adams no longer sees them as hopeful, but rather as records of “what we purchased, what we paid, and what we could not buy. They document a separation from ourselves, and in turn from the natural world that we professed to love.”²⁴⁴

Another author Robert Adams admired was Edward Abbey, who wrote with passion about the American West in the late 1960s. Though he eschewed the moniker “nature writer,”

²⁴³ Ibid.

²⁴⁴ Robert Adams, introduction to *What We Bought*.

Abbey wrote ardently about both his love of nature and his abhorrence for those who were destroying it. In Adams's own writings about the American West, the influences of Abbey are clear. The "sadness" with which Abbey wrote about the loss of open spaces (along with such writers as Edward Hoagland and Peter Mathiessen) resonated with Adams. Abbey's well-known work, *Desert Solitaire: A Season in the Wilderness* (1968), conveys his sensibilities.

Written in the first person, in a diaristic mode, *Desert Solitaire* derives from Abbey's experiences working for the two seasons as a park ranger in Utah. Throughout the book, Abbey adamantly upholds the importance of wilderness, both in actuality and as an emotional and psychic necessity for human survival. He writes in one passage:

Suppose we say that wilderness invokes nostalgia...
not merely sentimental nostalgia for the lost America our forefathers
knew...It means something lost and still present, something remote and
at the same time intimate...The Romantic view, while not the whole
truth, is a necessary part of the whole truth.²⁴⁵

This last sentence is particularly relevant to Adams's own thoughts, and relates back to the sentiments he expressed in his letter to Ansel Adams when he wrote that the "power" of Ansel Adams's photographs was to suggest that "it [the West] is eternal, no matter what happens to be out in front of us at the moment." For Robert Adams, like Abbey, the Romantic view is a necessary part of his definition of truth seeking, through photography. Abbey was unsentimental in his romanticism, much like Adams. Abbey writes: "Paradise is not a garden of bliss and changeless perfection...the Paradise of which I write and wish to praise is with us yet, the here and now, the actual, tangible, dogmatically real earth on which we stand."²⁴⁶ Abbey's resignation to these conditions parallels the same melancholic acknowledgement of a

²⁴⁵ Edward Abbey, *Desert Solitaire: A Season in the Wilderness* (New York: MacGraw-Hill Book Company, 1968), 166-167.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 167.

“dogmatically real earth” that Adams felt when photographing.²⁴⁷ Further, Abbey knew that, in a country whose landscape was rapidly changing, there had to be some sort of balance, but not in the way that Thoreau would have sanctioned it: as an insistence on one “world” at a time (city *or* wilderness). Rather, Abbey attempted “to make the best of two,”²⁴⁸ acknowledging the need to understand through experience the first in order to understand and absorb the experience of the second: “Mountains complement the desert as desert complements city, as wilderness complements and completes civilization,” writes Abbey. “A man could be a lover and defender of the wilderness without ever in his lifetime leaving the boundaries of asphalt, power lines, and right-angled surfaces. We need wilderness whether or not we ever set foot in it.”²⁴⁹ Here again, Adams’s assertion, as stated in his letter to Ansel Adams cited earlier in this chapter, that there is an “absolute purity of the wilderness, a purity we need to know”—even if he could not picture it as such—relates directly to Abbey’s sentiments.

Finally, for Abbey, the importance of light—in particular, the harsh, pellucid Western desert sunlight—figures prominently in his appreciation and reverence for the landscape. Abbey writes: “Only the sunlight holds things together. Noon is the crucial hour: the desert reveals itself nakedly and cruelly, with no meaning but its own existence.”²⁵⁰ Like Adams, light, for Abbey, provides an incontestable, unavoidable illumination (both physically and metaphorically), as that which clarifies and defines the world as we see it, and thus, our place within it. Its presence in Adams’s new West work is palpable, and consciously seen.

²⁴⁷ Robert Adams, *To Make It Home*, 157, 159.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 265.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 129.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 135.

Finally, Edward Abbey readily acknowledged—perhaps more so than Stegner—the importance of a Romantic conception of pure wilderness. As Abbey wrote: “the Romantic view, while not the whole truth, is a necessary part of the whole truth.”²⁵¹ This insight is very much in keeping with Adams’s philosophy. Even if he felt he could not picture an ideal West, Robert Adams made photographs that offered him a means for salvaging some portion of that ideal landscape through art, as well as coming to terms with its impossibility. This oscillation between melancholy for the loss of an irretrievable West on the one hand, and reverence and gratitude for its enduring realities—between Stegner’s “love and lamentation” — characterizes the entirety of Adams’s early career.

Conclusion

Robert Adams’s desire to “see the facts” of the new, suburban American West was not simply a matter of photographing the landscape with a more distanced neutrality than predecessors like Ansel Adams, nor was it an attempt to break with a Romantic tradition that hailed the restorative necessity for civilization of knowing untouched nature. Deeply concerned with this history and its relevance to his own time, which was shaped more by the discourse of Leopold’s ecological consciousness than Muir’s more sentimental enthusiasm for exploration, Adams’s new West photographs were not ruptures within a history of artistic Western landscape photography. Rather, they were inspired by reformulations of a longstanding wilderness idea. His literary affinities, perhaps even more than his knowledge of photographic precedents, informed his visual aesthetic.

A recent career retrospective (organized by Yale University Art Gallery for 2010, travelling internationally through 2014), major publications of his oeuvre, and several reevaluations of the New Topographics photographers have situated Robert Adams as one of the

²⁵¹ Abbey, 208.

most important landscape photographers of the last forty years.²⁵² He is now, in essence, at a point career-wise that corresponds to the degree of attention Ansel Adams was receiving when some “upstart, albeit obscure, photographer running around with the same name doing landscapes” wrote him a fan letter in 1979. To that missive, Ansel Adams responded with a letter to Robert Adams, in which he wrote:

I fear you are prone to underestimate yourself and your work!
I am naturally pleased if I have been able to help-as I have
been helped many times myself...

I think the world remains as beautiful as it ever was
but that we are a little more aware of the human grime...

I admit, I believe in, and have practiced as much as I could,
a positivistic attitude in my work. I find it very difficult to
comprehend much of the view-points of the art expression of
our era. As there is nothing I can do about it
except to continue visualizing the images I do, I am
resigned to my fate!

I am pleased there is another Adams doing photography.²⁵³

In this letter, from the elder Adams to the younger photographer, there is sense of respect for Robert Adams’s achievements, if not exactly a thorough understanding of his artistic perspective. Far less of the “positivistic attitude” that Ansel Adams practiced manifests in Robert Adams’s melancholic landscapes, which give greater attention to the “human grime.” The desire of both men to picture beauty in the world, however, is a shared sentiment. It compelled both photographers to repeatedly focus on a beloved subject—the landscape of the American west—

²⁵² These publications include Britt Salvesen’s *New Topographics* (2009), Robert Adams, *Robert Adams: The Place We Live A Retrospective Selection of Photographs 1964-2009* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), and *Reframing the New Topographics*, edited by Greg Forster Rice and John Rohrbach (Chicago: Center for American Places at Columbia College, 2012).

²⁵³ Letter reproduced in Kemmerer, 10.

that changed radically, if not irrevocably, in the span of the generation that separates their practice.

Chapter Four: Lee Friedlander's *The American Monument*: Commemoration and Dislocation in Bicentennial America

One of Lee Friedlander's best-known photographs from his book *The American Monument* (1976) features the 1937 bronze statue of Father Francis P. Duffy in Times Square, New York City [fig. 4.1]. In this image, the larger-than-life figure of the venerated Catholic chaplain is shown standing atop a pedestal, in front of a large Celtic-style cross and surrounded by an iron fence. Friedlander situates the monument in the center of the composition, and photographs it from street level, such that the seven-and-a-half-foot figure looms well above the viewer.²⁵⁴ The monument's otherwise formidable presence is not given much room to breathe, however, amidst the visual cacophony of surrounding scaffolding, buildings, and advertising signage. Vying for the viewer's attention are the bold black-and-white graphics of Times Square's half-price Broadway "tkts" booth and a massive electronic billboard for Coca-Cola, whose trademark white wave undulates directly behind the top of the monument's cross. These details are spatially compressed, an affect Friedlander achieved by manipulating the camera's depth of field such that three-dimensional perspective is flattened into two dimensions. This transformation challenges the viewer's ability to distinguish foreground from background, and pushes the image's black, white and gray tones into a fused matrix of competing visual information.

²⁵⁴ The entire monument, sculpted by Charles Keck (1875-1971), stands at a height of just over seventeen feet. The monument is comprised of the figure of Duffy, which was cast in bronze and stands at 7 feet 6 inches; the cross (over 17 feet high), pedestal (3 feet 7 inches), base (2 feet 1 inch), as well as a platform and steps, all of which are made of green granite. The statue was cast in 1937, and the statue was dedicated on May 7th of that year. On the back of the cross itself is inscribed: LIEUTENANT COLONEL / FRANCES P. DUFFY / MAY 2, 1871 - JUNE 26, 1932 / CATHOLIC PRIEST / CHAPLAIN / 165TH U.S. INFANTRY / OLD 69TH N.Y. / A LIFE OF SERVICE / FOR GOD AND COUNTRY / SPANISH AMERICAN WAR / NEW YORK NATIONAL GUARD / MEXICAN BORDER / WORLD WAR / DISTINGUISHED SERVICE CROSS / DISTINGUISHED SERVICE MEDAL / CONSPICUOUS SERVICE CROSS / LEGION D'HONNEUR / CROIX DE GUERRE. The figure itself was donated by the Father Duffy Memorial Committee, and the remainder of the monument was funded by the Works Progress Administration. See <http://www.nycgovparks.org/parks/M093/monuments/416>.

By deliberately crafting the photograph using these formal complexities, Friedlander creates conceptual ambiguity as well. The Duffy figure, bearing a stoic expression and military attire, with its helmet at its feet and a Bible in its left hand, possesses a sense of heroic and historic stature amidst this chaotic urban tangle of signs and architecture. And yet, the monument, and by extension Duffy's legacy (he was a former World War I military chaplain who served in the Times Square area in the 1910s and 1920s), seem to have lost considerable ground in this same social landscape. It is thus difficult to assess whether the monument of Father Duffy, a religious and civic symbol venerated within the culture of 1930s New Deal liberalism, had, by the time of Friedlander's photograph, become overshadowed by the signs (literally and figuratively) of late-twentieth-century capitalism or had successfully held them at bay. Through Friedlander's documentary-style aesthetic, and his trademark juxtapositions and irony-laden visual puns, the possibility of such contrary interpretations is not only encouraged but also becomes a dominant theme in the work.²⁵⁵

Another photograph from Friedlander's *The American Monument* conveys a similar sense of physical and symbolic dislocation, though in this instance the sense of not quite knowing where we are supposed to look—a disorienting effect—is even stronger [fig. 4.2]. In his photograph *Mount Rushmore, South Dakota*, the central focus is not, as one might expect, the actual sixty-five foot monument, which features the heads of U.S. presidents George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Theodore Roosevelt, and Abraham Lincoln that sculptor Gutzon Borglum carved into the white granite of the Black Hills between 1925 and 1941. Rather, the sculpture appears only as a diminutive reflection in one of the windows of a visitor's center at

²⁵⁵ "Documentary style" aesthetic refers to Walker Evans's definition, as discussed noted in my introduction. In brief, Evans distinguished "documentary style" from the more utilitarian "documentary" photography, noting that while the former may be considered art, the latter cannot. Leslie Katz, "An interview with Walker Evans," in Vicki Goldberg, ed. *Photography in Print* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1981), 364-365.

the site. These windows and the insistent geometric grid of mullions, in fact, consume the entire rectangular frame of Friedlander's image, with the windows functioning as visually penetrable and reflective surfaces. Through Friedlander's even handling of focus across the picture plane, and his use of a large depth of field, the human figures that appear inside the building and the reflections of figures outside intermingle, such that it becomes virtually impossible to distinguish one space from the other. The only figures that are clearly and solidly positioned outside the windows are an older man and woman, each with elbows cocked in nearly identical gestures holding a viewing device at eye level: the man a small camera, the woman a pair of binoculars.

Friedlander's primary subject here, in visual terms, appears to be the act of looking itself, though it is a fragmented exercise. We, as viewers, look at the tourists, who are presumably viewing Mount Rushmore. There seems to be no definitive sense of space in this photograph: given the image's structure, solid figures, and ephemeral reflections are difficult to distinguish. If the older couple serve as the most grounded and solid components of the photograph (the remaining tourists appear as little more than ghostly apparitions), they also act as surrogates for the viewer—and perhaps for Friedlander himself. We are uncertain what we are looking at, or what we are looking for. Friedlander crafts his photograph to encourage this sense of visual confusion, such that viewers are left bouncing around the photograph as if in a hall of mirrors. We are certain only that we *are* looking, though without any specific understanding of *why*.

Insistently powerful disorientation, manifested in these two photographs through various formal ambiguities, is a key to Lee Friedlander's *The American Monument*. As I will argue in this chapter, this aesthetic strategy, coupled with Friedlander's choice of subject—sculptural monuments, memorials, figurative statues, and historical markers located throughout the continental United States—resonates with a deeper psychic dislocation that was felt by many

Americans in the mid-1970s (as some historians have argued). This visual confusion is conveyed through the tension between the sentiments of commemoration, patriotism, and heroic ideals that American monuments are meant to embody, and Friedlander's deadpan approach to photographing them within the social landscape of a post-Vietnam, post-Watergate, economically recessed America. Friedlander's aesthetic strategy is evident in specific photographs, as well as the book's overarching structure and editing.

Part I: Making *The American Monument*

The decision to make a limited edition, fine-art photography book of Friedlander's American monument photographs came several years after the photographer had begun taking pictures of the subject in the late 1960s through the early 1970s on various cross-country road trips. After meeting book publisher Leslie George Katz around 1969 and reviewing contact sheets, Friedlander and Katz noticed the prevalence of monuments as subject matter. Katz decided to publish a limited edition book of 2,000 copies through Eakins Press, a printing establishment named in honor of the American painter Thomas Eakins, that Katz founded in 1966 with money gained from the sale of a group of the artist's paintings.²⁵⁶ Katz, who had an eclectic career before founding the press, was passionate about all aspects of book making, and had a deep interest in American history.²⁵⁷ His interests were reflected in the meticulously crafted and elegantly designed books Eakins Press produced on American sculpture, photography, poetry, and the New York City Ballet. The first photography book published by

²⁵⁶ *The American Monument* was also produced in a "special edition" of 150 copies, which included an original print, as well a "deluxe edition" of fifty copies, which included ten original prints and was designed as a two volume set. The paintings belonged to Katz's father, who had secretly collected and then entrusted the works to his son, who eventually sold them to the collector Joseph Hirshhorn. The sale provided the funding for the founding of the press. Jennifer Dunning, "Obituary: Leslie George Katz, 78, Founder of Eakins Press," *New York Times*, May 4, 1997.

²⁵⁷ Katz was a speechwriter for Adlai Stevenson, wrote for *Classic Comics* and published the short-lived *Arts* magazine.

Katz's press was Walker Evans's *Message from the Interior* (1966), a twelve-plate gravure publication featuring the photographer's views of architectural interiors. Katz also released, in 1973, an eighty-page volume about the Saint-Gaudens Memorial by Robert Gould Shaw, with an extended essay on the subject by Lincoln Kirstein, and twenty hand-pulled gravures by Richard Benson. Both of these publications served as important precedents to Friedlander's *The American Monument*, and spoke directly to Katz's interests in American photography and monumental sculpture and forms.

Both Benson and Katz were integral to the collaboration with Friedlander that brought *The American Monument* to fruition. Benson, a highly esteemed printer, befriended Friedlander in 1970, while he was working at Meriden Gravure Company where he assisted with the printing of Friedlander's first book, *Self Portrait* (1970). Benson made all the halftone negatives for *The American Monument* according to a unique technique he mastered through earlier experimentation. Benson also had a hand in determining the paper selection.²⁵⁸ Katz, however, had the greatest influence on the project in terms of its unique design and editing. Early in its conception, Katz determined that he wanted to use screw-posts as the book's binding, which allowed for the removal of individual sheets that he considered to be suitable for framing.²⁵⁹ Katz also wanted the book to be covered in a blue-green ledger cloth, which was produced by a specialist bookbinder in Manhattan²⁶⁰ [fig. 4.3]. Finally, Friedlander worked closely with Katz to

²⁵⁸ Benson recommended the unconventional use of an uncoated offset stock of paper, to best accommodate offset printing techniques. For a full account, read Richard Benson, "Working with Lee," in Galassi, *Friedlander* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2005), 438-439.

²⁵⁹ This notion—of reproducing photographs to such a high degree of finish that they could easily be seen as finished prints in their own right—was one Katz had harbored since printing Evans's *Message from the Interior*, in which he included a thin black line close to the spine, indicating where one might wish to cut and remove the individual plates. Thanks to Richard Benson for sharing this information.

²⁶⁰ In his retrospective monograph *Friedlander*, Galassi speculates that the decision to use blue-green ledger cloth may have derived from the example of Walker Evans, who used black Bible cloth to cover the first edition of his

select the final edit of 213 photographs from well over one thousand prints.²⁶¹ Upon completion of this time-consuming endeavor, Friedlander is reputed to have remarked to the publisher:

“Leslie, that’s one motherfucker of a book we’ve made.”²⁶²

Reviews of *The American Monument* just after its publication in 1976 were generally positive. Though the book was not conceived specifically to coincide with the country’s Bicentennial celebrations, the timing prompted several writers and reviewers, both at the time and in later assessments, to make a loose association between the nation’s 200th anniversary and the book. The reasons for making this broad connection are fairly obvious: American monuments are inevitably seen as markers of time, memory, and history, all of which were at the forefront of political and popular rhetoric during the nation’s anniversary celebrations. Most assessments, however, simply make mention of this correlation without going into too much detail. In his 1975 review of the book for *The New Republic*, writer Phil Patton simply stated that “*The American Monument* announces itself as a documentary survey, perhaps one of the more reasonable projects inspired by a Bicentennial year.”²⁶³ Peter Galassi, in his retrospective monograph on Friedlander (2005), assessed the connections to 1976 as an accident but also acknowledged that the context of Watergate, Nixon’s resignation, and the end of the Vietnam War were “essential” for understanding the inherent contradictions of the photographs—the tensions between past virtues and current social values reified in the subject matter. “In the midst

1938 book *American Photographs*. Peter Galassi, *Friedlander* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2005), 51. Richard Benson, however, doubts that this was in fact the direct inspiration, though certainly Katz, Friedlander, and Benson were all very familiar and fond of the book, and knew Evans personally. April M. Watson in conversation with Richard Benson, April 17, 2013.

²⁶¹ Benson, “Working with Lee,” in Galassi, 438.

²⁶² April M. Watson in conversation with Richard Benson, April 17, 2013.

²⁶³ As stated, Friedlander’s book was not directly inspired by the 200th anniversary. Phil Patton, “The American Monument,” *The New Republic*, November 13, 1976, 37.

of one of America's most inglorious moments, Friedlander reached out across the country and deep into the past. The monument series...offers plenty of evidence that the nation cannot be defined by those men alone, nor its future defined solely by its troubled present."²⁶⁴ Galassi thus hints at the complexities regarding the country's understanding of commemoration in the mid-1970s as seen in Friedlander's photographs, but does not belabor the point.

More often than not, reviews of the book avoided situating the photographs within the social context of Bicentennial America and focused instead on the book's place within a teleological progression of iconic photography books about American subjects. Many writers compared the significance of *The American Monument* to Walker Evans's *American Photographs* (1938; second edition reissued in 1962) and Robert Frank's *The Americans* (published in Paris in 1958 as *Les Américains*, and in the United States as *The Americans* the following year).²⁶⁵ Certainly, the focus on the vernacular American landscape reflects Evans's influence: Friedlander met Evans around 1957 through an editor at *Sports Illustrated* named Ben Schultz, and the two became lifelong friends. Evans introduced Friedlander to various photography and related books (though it was Friedlander's close friend and fellow photographer Garry Winogrand who introduced him to *American Photographs*).²⁶⁶ Friedlander also knew Robert Frank, and owned a copy of the 1958 French edition of his book.²⁶⁷

Despite these acknowledged influences, *The American Monument* was a unique publication. The book's overall design, its shape, size, and presentation suggested a number of

²⁶⁴ Peter Galassi, "You Have to Change to Stay the Same," in *Friedlander*, 52.

²⁶⁵ See Andy Grundberg and Julia Scully, "U.S.A.: Pushing the Limits," *Modern Photography*, July 1976, 79, 80-81; Alan Trachtenberg, "The Presence of Walker Evans," *Atlantic Monthly*, September 1978, 47-54; Richard Woodward, "Lee Friedlander: American Monument," *Artnews*, November 1989, 140-145.

²⁶⁶ Richard Woodward, "Lee Friedlander: American Monument," *Artnews*, November 1989, 143.

²⁶⁷ Galassi, 33.

vernacular associations: a nineteenth-century photograph album, a family snapshot album, a survey or a ledger book. These correlations reinforced Friedlander's own preferences for picturing the mundane, middle-class American social landscape, which he had been doing since the early 1960s. The weight and heft of the book's physical appearance, as well as its eccentric cover design and binding, differentiated *The American Monument* from the precedents of Evans and Frank. Friedlander's book was a distinct publication, relatively scarce in supply, and set apart from the ordinary.

Part II: Meaning and *The American Monument*

Though the immediate intentions behind the design and conception of *The American Monument* likely had more to do with the personal creative interests of Katz, Benson, and Friedlander, the resulting object is, I would argue, a commemorative form in itself. It was a means of offering to a specialized segment of the public an artistic rumination on the ambiguous physical and symbolic value of "the American monument" in the contemporary social landscape of the mid-1970s. This is not to imply, however, that the book reflected any facile understanding of commemoration, if the term is defined simply as an act which honors the memory of people or events of the past.²⁶⁸ Rather, Friedlander's book commemorates the very malleability of symbolism inherent in monumental forms. The ambiguities and formal complexities in Friedlander's 213 photographs, as well as the unsystematic organization of the book itself, reinforce the idea that the meanings of these images and their subjects are inherently unstable, as are the vernacular landscapes in which these structures are often situated. One could argue that

²⁶⁸ Katz's essay did attempt to frame the photographs in that vein, albeit unsuccessfully. He described the book as "a memorial in photographs to the American Monument," though several writers and curators have since noted that Katz's nostalgic and even "strident" assessment of the subject matter was not fully reflected in Friedlander's photographs. Leslie Katz, *The American Monument*, unpaginated, and Peter Galassi, 52.

with *The American Monument* Friedlander is in effect commemorating the impossibility of appreciating memorial forms as anything but contingent in their historical relevance.

Several scholars have addressed the contingency of commemorative forms. As Kirk Savage has noted in his recent book *Monument Wars* (2005), the history of commemoration is “a history of change and transformation.”²⁶⁹ James Mayo also makes this point in his book *War Memorials as Political Landscape: The American Experience and Beyond* (1988). Mayo notes that a change in historical contexts alters the meaning of memorials. As the hierarchy of cultural values change, the symbolism of monumental forms may also change, or be seen to have conflicting meanings. In addition, as the historical importance of certain people or events begins to fade from memory, so do the memorials commemorating them.²⁷⁰ Erika Doss has written about this malleability in her book *Memorial Mania: Public Feeling in America* (2010). As she notes, when new monuments and memorials arise in place of the old, they create layered and complicated responses to public remembrance. This “memorial mania,” as Doss identifies it, can reach obsessive levels, such that in times of increased uncertainty and anxiety, issues of memory and history are heightened, and there is an urgent desire to claim those issues visibly in public commemorative structures and spaces.²⁷¹ Thus a memorial landscape rarely remains unchanged. As Kirk Savage notes, “People and history get in the way,” which by necessity forces these sites to change and adapt.²⁷²

²⁶⁹ Kirk Savage, *Monument Wars: Washington, D.C., the National Mall, and the Transformation of the American Landscape* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 11.

²⁷⁰ James M. Mayo, *War Memorials as Political Landscape: The American Experience and Beyond* (New York: Praeger, 1988), 1, 8.

²⁷¹ Erika Doss, *Memorial Mania: Public Feeling in America* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 2.

²⁷² Savage, 7.

Throughout *The American Monument*, Friedlander uses formal complexities to impart a sense of ambiguity, dislocation, and disorientation. The images thus resonate conceptually with this more complicated definition of commemoration as it was felt in America in the mid-1970s. Indeed, the visible traces of “people and history” are not the only things, metaphorically speaking, that get in the way of Friedlander’s landscapes. Many of his images use obstruction quite literally as a visual device, often in combination with other pictorial strategies such as manipulation of scale and perspective, and the conflation of ephemeral reflection and solid form. At times, the monuments in Friedlander’s photographs are almost completely obscured by other vernacular elements in the picture frame, or seen at such a reduced scale that they are nearly impossible to discern. Telephone booths, telephone poles, shrubbery, trees, architecture, street signs, and, reliably, pigeons are given equal or greater visual presence than the monuments themselves. At times, such elements are situated such that they compete for attention in the informational democracy of Friedlander’s frames.

This jostling of forms, manipulation of scale and vantage point are readily apparent in a photograph titled *Admiral Raphael Semmes of the Confederate States Navy, Mobile, Alabama*, [fig. 4.4]. Situated in the middle of the image is a telephone booth, behind which are two vertical poles, which extend up through the top edge of the frame. Given the transparency of the phone booth, the elements behind it are completely visible: parked cars, advertising signage, and the horizontal and vertical structure of the booth itself all compete for attention in this compressed frame within a frame. There is a similar density of information to the left and right of the phone booth: shop signs, storefronts, street signage, cars, and fragments of taller, seemingly newer building, perhaps a hotel or office building. The actual bronze figure of Admiral Raphael Semmes appears only as a tiny sliver, set atop a pedestal in what appears, through strained

examination, to be a traffic meridian. The monument is afforded no visual hierarchy amidst the landscape's informational thicket: it is simply one small element among many vernacular components.

How could such an image, in which the monument itself is barely visible, be considered “commemorative”? Friedlander's photograph certainly does not conform to the visual formula that earlier non-artistic photographs of the Semmes monument employed as a means of both representing and celebrating the structure's symbolic significance. Such distinctions are apparent when comparing Friedlander's image with two earlier photographs of the statue, which was erected in 1900 at the end of a long, rectangular strip of land dividing the main street (Government Street) called Duncan Place. In the first of these photographs, which was taken between 1900-1909 soon after the site's dedication, the vantage point is well above ground level [fig. 4.5]. The image is composed to emphasize both the monument and its placement within the rectangular, grassed-in strip of land dividing the street, that is planted with young trees (Duncan Place). In a color postcard, which dates to between 1930-1940 [fig. 4.6], Duncan Place is less a feature than the monument of Semmes, a subject remembered for his Civil War service as a lauded Confederate naval commander (Rear Admiral) who successfully destroyed Union merchant and commerce vessels while deftly eluding capture. Though a portion of the setting and surrounding architecture are present, these elements are very clearly positioned in the background, so as not to interfere with the full visual appreciation of the statue itself. Both of these images of the Semmes monument are distinguished from Friedlander's photograph in their emphasis on the structure's priority of purpose within the vernacular landscape. They employ more conventional vantage points, picturing the statue either from the front (which for figural monuments is the most recognizable portion), or as it is seen in the context of the public space.

The proximity of the photographer to the subject in both images is closer than in Friedlander's photograph, such that the details of the monument are more readable and visible. Friedlander, by contrast, deliberately flouts these photographic conventions. He pictures the Semmes monument in profile, rather than from the front, and stands at a greater distance from the statue. Further, he does not exclude any of the elements of the vernacular landscape that are seen to occupy the space between him and his subject; in fact, he refuses to create any sort of conventional pictorial hierarchy that might elevate the monument's prominence within the frame.

It is this lack of compositional clarity in Friedlander's image, and the photographer's deliberate flouting of conventional rules for "proper" picture taking that suggests ambiguity, and even ambivalence about his subject. If it were not for the title of this image, *Admiral Raphael Semmes of the Confederate States Navy, Mobile, Alabama*, the viewer would likely have no clear idea of the picture's subject. Through his trademark pictorial strategies, Friedlander is thus commemorating, I would argue, a contemporary inability to "see" the significance of this "heroic" figure, who may have once been celebrated for his historic significance, but by the early 1970s is a negligible presence in the landscape.

Further compounding the picture's formal and conceptual complexity is the confusion over how to classify the photograph itself. By crafting a picture that deliberately evokes many different categories of photographic practice at once—document, snapshot, conceptual art—Friedlander situates his image at the crossroads of many genres whose meanings and intentions converge, and at times, contradict one another, often within the same frame. Does the viewer look at a casually and spontaneously seen subject in this image?

Martha Rosler first noted the potential for conflated meanings in Friedlander's photographs in an *Artforum* essay in 1975. In this text, Rosler identified the limitations of

modernist formalism and how it operated in Friedlander's practice. She wrote: "Whatever meaning that resides in Friedlander's photographs, and it is more than the image management at the Modern has let show, this set of claims allows Friedlander, and the hundreds of young photographers following the same lines, to put playfulness and pseudopropositions forward as their strategy while identifying some set of formal maneuvers as the essential meaning of their work."²⁷³ Rosler goes on to summarize the full spectrum of meaning into which Friedlander's images might be situated, concluding: "The level of import of Friedlander's work is open to question and can be read anywhere from photo funnies to metaphysical dismay."²⁷⁴

Building on Rosler's assessment, then, one might consider that the inscrutable and at times conflicting meanings in Friedlander's photographs are not simply a reflection of the photographer's individual artistry. The images might also characterize the broader cultural uncertainty that permeated the late 1960s and early to mid-1970s. Friedlander's photographs could be convincingly situated in a particularly conflicted historical moment, and thus be seen as a commemoration of that moment, particularly as presented in a meticulously crafted fine art photography book. The sheer quantity of photographs he produced, and the very decision to edit those images as a book titled *The American Monument* suggests a recognition of the monument's physical, commemorative significance within the vernacular American landscape of this period. Creating *The American Monument* thus may be seen as a commemorative act.

Part III: Commemorating Cultural Malaise: *The American Monument* and America's Bicentennial

What factors defined the cultural weariness of America in the mid-1970s to which Friedlander was responding? By 1976, the year marking the publication of *The American*

²⁷³ Martha Rosler, "Lee Friedlander's Guarded Strategies," *Artforum*, April 1975, 47.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 53.

Monument as well as the nation's Bicentennial celebrations, Americans were deeply divided over the virtues of America's past. Such sentiments had been building since the late 1960s. The assassinations of Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert Kennedy, both in 1968, seemed for many to mark the end of the utopian ideals that fueled years of social and political protests in the earlier part of the 1960s. The radical cultural shifts that occurred as a result of the gains made by the civil rights and women's liberation movement left many Americans who preferred the previous generation's status quo feeling incredibly uncertain. The year 1968 also marked a significant turning point in the Vietnam War. The Tet Offensive in January of that year demonstrated to Americans for the first time the strength and coordination of North Vietnamese communist troops, working with the Viet Cong. The My Lai massacre also took place in March of 1968. This event came to light more than a year later, in November of 1969, when Lt. William Calley, who led the command of the Charlie company, 11th Brigade, American Division, was charged with murder. The revelations of My Lai—in which between 300 and 510 Vietnamese civilians, many of them women, children, and the elderly, were raped, tortured, and slaughtered—exacerbated an already strong opposition by U.S. citizens to the Vietnam War.

By 1973, the “long sixties” came to an end, as the period was marked by several watershed events.²⁷⁵ In January, the Supreme Court decision in *Roe v. Wade* overturned the state ban on abortion. Nixon, entering his second term as U.S. President after a landslide victory over Democratic candidate George McGovern, ordered an end to American involvement in the Vietnam War. In October, OPEC nations declared an oil embargo against the United States in response to U.S. political support of Israel. This embargo lasted until March of 1974, initiating a decade-long economic recession. Perhaps the most significant event of 1973, however, was the breaking of the Watergate scandal, which resulted in Richard Nixon's resignation as president in

²⁷⁵ Andreas Killen, introduction to *1973 Nervous Breakdown* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 1999), 1-11.

August of the following year. This event, in combination with these other precedents, deeply compromised Americans' trust in the presidential office and their faith in the U.S. government. As Beth Bailey and David Farber note in their assessment of the 1970s: "The combined failures of the Vietnam War and Watergate...had led reporters and editors, as well as most Americans, to conclude that an attitude of fierce skepticism, even cynicism, about the honesty, competency, integrity, and even humanity of government officials was a mandatory defense against the knavery and policy failures the nation had endured."²⁷⁶

The 1976 Bicentennial celebrations, arriving only sixteen months after Nixon's resignation, were thus met with decidedly mixed reactions. Americans taking measure of their current social, political and economic landscape were also assessing which past values, traditions, and historical narratives were still relevant. One writer, who authored an article that appeared in the August 1973 American Bicentennial newsletter (a small periodical that reported on the planning and organizational activities of the American Revolution Bicentennial Committee) was critical yet hopeful about the anniversary: "Watergate may in time heighten the true meaning of the Bicentennial, causing us to look more clearly to the nation's fundamental principles...and revive our determination to bring those goals to fruition."²⁷⁷ Others were less sanguine. *New York Times* reporter John Leonard wrote, in his review of one Bicentennial event: "Dignity has been in short supply for our 200th birthday."²⁷⁸ Leonard's article further conveyed a sense of weariness with the kind of organized political protests that characterized the mid to late

²⁷⁶ Beth Bailey and David Farber, *America in the Seventies* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004), 14.

²⁷⁷ This writer, who was unnamed in the article, also revealed his distaste for the rhetoric that Nixon's ex-speechwriter William Safire was promulgating in the *New York Times* when Safire wrote, optimistically, that "people will forget Watergate and ...Nixon will survive and finish in a Bicentennial glow." See "The Bicentennial: Dying or About to be Born?" and "Commentary: Watergate and the Bicentennial," in *American Bicentennial Newsletter* 3:8 (August 1973), 1-4.

²⁷⁸ John Leonard, "An Open-Air Attic of Our Origins," *New York Times*, July 4, 1976.

1960s. As he summarized at the end of his article: “At marches, as in airplanes, as on television, the nation looks monochromatic, transistorized...It would be nice...to think differently.”²⁷⁹

Leonard’s words, which describe the social landscape of the period, speak to a broader national weariness and wariness, which was the combined result of protest fatigue and a media-saturated social landscape that rendered everyday experience a dull and monotonous affair.

Accompanying the uncertainty that found its nexus in the Bicentennial events of 1976 was a heightened sense of nostalgic yearning for idealized and oversimplified notions of the past. As cultural historian Michael Kammen notes in his book *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture*, there is a direct correlation between intensified nostalgia and cultural anxiety during periods of uncertainty or transition. The more a society feels a discontinuity with its past, the more prone it is to look back to a rose-colored history in a highly subjective fashion.²⁸⁰ As David Lowenthal, a professor of geography at University College London, wrote in an article on the Bicentennial landscape: “The Republic’s two-hundredth birthday party has been a protracted exercise in nostalgia. Americans now deplore their present landscapes and institutions, take a gloomy view of the nation’s future, and hark back to the past as a golden age.”²⁸¹ Martin E. Marty, writing for the *New York Times*, voiced a similar observation: “The past is back in favor because the present is too unattractive to provide a

²⁷⁹ Ibid. Leonard noted that though some Americans, still seized by the fervor to protest, were marching on the nation’s capital on July 4, 1976, to demand independence from big business, he felt the country needed more opportunities, such as those provided by the ethnic folklife festival he was reporting on for the *New York Times*, for Americans to gather and eat, dance and listen to music.

²⁸⁰ Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 645.

²⁸¹ David Lowenthal, “The Bicentennial Landscape: A Mirror Held Up to the Past,” *Geographical Review* 67:3 (July 1977), 255.

base for looking with hope into the future.”²⁸² This sentimental desire to look back to an irrecoverable time manifested in a heightened interest for many middle-class Americans in such activities as family genealogy, historic building preservation, and Revolutionary War reenactments. Looking back to an idealized past was also a response to the civil unrest of the previous decade, and was for many Americans a way to return to a time in history when communities were deemed more cohesive. “When the country is in turmoil, history is our only stabilizing factor,” one man who worked at Mystic Seaport in Connecticut reported to *Newsweek* in July 1973. In the same article, a woman identified as an organizer for the Boston Bicentennial, noted: “We’ve just been bound up in riots, unrest, and a very divisive war... People are now looking for a sense of community and a sense of values. They are looking for a reason to say ‘We’re Americans—that’s not so bad.’”²⁸³

Lowenthal and others also reported on the commercialization and “Disneyfication” related to this increased nostalgia for the past, which for many seemed to fall more firmly into the category of fantasy and entertainment than of serious investigation.²⁸⁴ Throughout 1976, clichéd American symbols appeared on various consumer products: eagles, the American flag, the face of George Washington, minute men, and the Liberty Bell were reproduced on soda cans, six packs of beer, bags of sugar, toilet paper rolls, and disposal bags for sanitary napkins, among other items. One historian, Jesse Lemisch, identified this phenomenon as “Bicentennial Schlock,” in an article for *The New Republic*. Lemisch suggested that although “nobody was taken in” by the cheap packaging ploys, “nobody [took] responsibility for it,” suggesting that

²⁸² Martin E. Marty, “Looking backward Into the Future,” *New York Times*, February 6, 1975.

²⁸³ “Exploring America’s Past,” *Newsweek*, July 9, 1973, 50.

²⁸⁴ Lowenthal, 256.

there was a widespread cultural ambivalence, and even resignation towards the commercialized and “cartoonified” versions of American history that shaped the events and populated the consumer landscape of 1976.²⁸⁵

Despite the sense of disdain, psychic ambivalence, and confusion many Americans were feeling with respect to their country’s ideals—both those of the past and those of the present—there remained a lingering sentiment of cautious optimism and hope. Republican John W. Warner, who served as Undersecretary of the Navy under the Nixon administration before being appointed by President Gerald Ford to be chief administrator for the American Revolution Bicentennial Administration, expressed such lukewarm sentiments when he gave his summary of Bicentennial events: “We did our best,” he simply noted. In his final report, Warner assumed a conciliatory and humbled tone, as he reflected on a country that was beginning to understand, if not completely accept, that to perceive of history as a collective consensus, and focus only on its more heroic chapters, was no longer viable. “Along with citizen participation [in the Bicentennial events], there came a great learning experience,” noted Warner. “I believe we now have a better understanding of our past—its greatness and well as its faults—and a greater understanding of how all faiths and all nationalities have brought—and continue to bring—something of themselves to American life.”²⁸⁶ As Warner’s words suggest, by 1976 many Americans—though disenchanted and disillusioned—still fervently wished to construct a coherent and believable past that accepted both the nation’s perceived triumphs as well as its shortcomings. At times deeply skeptical of traditionally held American values, many Americans also felt that only by accepting the influence of the past—rather than trying to recapture it

²⁸⁵ Jesse Lemisch, “Bicentennial Schlock,” *New Republic*, November 6, 1976, 21-23.

²⁸⁶ John W. Warner, preface to *The Bicentennial of the United States of America: A Final Report to the People*, Volume 1.

through nostalgic yearning—would the future landscapes, actions and ideals of the United States resonate with deeper symbolic meaning.²⁸⁷

Friedlander's American monument photographs, seen collectively, suggest these conflicting desires to look wistfully to the past and with optimism to the present and future. At times, Friedlander's photographs impart a sense of nostalgic reverence for the values of the past that are embodied in these monuments—heroism, civic and communal virtue. At other times, they appear to suggest a critical detachment from those same values. As such, the photographs both picture the contemporary psychic and geographic landscape of Bicentennial America, and are informed by it.

This dual aspect of Friedlander's work is perhaps less evident when assessing individual photographs from *The American Monument* than when considering the structure, editing, and organization of the book as a whole. The book includes a wide variety of monuments, memorials, and historical markers throughout the continental United States, such that it becomes virtually impossible to categorize them according to any one criterion. There is, indeed, a democratic nature to the broad, even disparate, selection of subjects Friedlander and Katz included in *The American Monument*. In terms of monument types, the book includes photographs of numerous war memorials commemorating the American Revolution, the War of 1812, the Spanish-American War, the Texas Revolution, the Mexican-American War, the American Civil War, and both World Wars. None of the images, however, are grouped together by specific conflict (with the exception of the Civil War, wherein Friedlander and Katz juxtaposed images made at the Gettysburg and Vicksburg battlefields). Another small category of monuments includes notable individuals, such as Christopher Columbus, Edgar Allan Poe,

²⁸⁷ Lowenthal, 267.

and Abraham Lincoln, almost all of which are figurative statues.²⁸⁸ Other monuments feature lesser-known explorers, pioneers, writers, athletes, entertainers, charitable figures, political, religious, business, and civic leaders. Friedlander also includes a significant number of statues memorializing anonymous working men and women, such as volunteer firemen, policemen, Red Cross volunteers, “gold star Mothers,” newsboys, and mechanics. Some monuments function simply as personifications—such as Art, Liberty, or Justice—which appear either as statues in their own right, or as part of a larger sculptural group. There are also many statues recognizing generalized conceptions associated with these wars and conflicts, such as the World War I doughboy, “those who made the supreme sacrifice,” and “veterans of all wars.” Many of these structures were originally conceived and dedicated between 1870 and 1930 during a period of increased nationalist sentiment that coalesced after the divisiveness of the American Civil War. Writing of this period, Erika Doss has called the phenomenon “statue mania,” a time when thousands of figurative likenesses of explorers, soldiers, and political leaders sprang up in small towns and cities across the country. Erected in public spaces, these monuments played an important role in celebrating civic virtues and collective national ideals.²⁸⁹ This fervor was symptomatic of a deeper cultural anxiety over the state of national unity amidst the massive changes brought about by modernization, industrialization, and immigration.

Noticeably absent from the book’s selection are many of the nation’s most iconic monuments: the Liberty Bell, the Statue of Liberty (though Friedlander photographed Boy Scout Statues of Liberty), the Washington Monument and the Lincoln Memorial. When a more well-known marker is included in a photograph, as discussed in Friedlander’s image of Mount

²⁸⁸ Figurative statues were a common commemorative form up until World War II, when there was shift in preference away from these kinds of sculptural monuments to more utilitarian memorials. See Mayo, 100.

²⁸⁹ Doss, 2. As Doss notes, the thousands of war memorials included in this craze also reinforced a gender-specific nationalist ideology of masculinity and military might.

Rushmore at the start of this chapter, the photographer often diminishes its physical significance by employing his trademark compositional devices for obstructing and confusing vision. In his image of Plymouth Rock, for example, Friedlander situates it on a page as one among three “rock” monuments that celebrate figures and chapters in American history that are far less known to a broad audience, including a state reservation marker in Niagara Falls, New York, and a marker for Snowshoe Thompson, Los Angeles, California. He also photographs Plymouth Rock through the bars of a barrier erected to keep tourists and onlookers from getting too close [fig. 4.7]. On a strictly visual level, there is a degree of absurdity about the subject that Friedlander appears to be highlighting, as he foregrounds the apparatus that has been constructed to protect this famous rock—hardly a fragile object—from desecration or theft. However, on a deeper level, Friedlander also suggests the cognitive dissonance that often occurs when one’s preconception of a monument (its symbolic aura) and its physical reality are at odds. Plymouth Rock occupies a mythic place in the collective American consciousness, as the site of the *Mayflower* pilgrims’ first landing and subsequent settlement of the colony in 1620. This chapter in American History is a staple of public school curricula throughout the United States. As such, Plymouth Rock has been assigned a particular symbolic value: the settlement of America by the first Europeans to arrive. In its actual appearance, however, this rock seems far from special, aside from the date of 1620 carved into its surface and its placement behind protective barriers. By choosing to photograph Plymouth Rock in this manner, as tourists might encounter it, and by juxtaposing it on a page with two other “rock” monuments that are invested with far less widely appreciated symbolic significance, Friedlander seems to imply that the ideals that inspire commemorative forms are of far greater importance than the forms themselves, perhaps even questioning their validity.

Most of the markers and memorials in Friedlander's book, however, are not mythic national monuments. Rather, they reference smaller episodes, generalized groups, or long-forgotten figures in American history, such as Snowshoe Thomsen, the Wireless Operators Lost at Sea, and Mary Dyer, among others.²⁹⁰ The mundanity of his selected subjects, the manner in which they are situated in a vernacular landscape, and the way they are juxtaposed with other images in the book, counters the patriotic grandeur that is suggested by the book's title. *The American Monument* implies a level of serious, even epic, treatment of a subject. However, the actual contents and organization of the book are mundane and disparate. The title and the photographs thus operate in playful tension with one another, further complicating any simple definitions of commemoration wherein meaning is coherent, consistent, and understood as a collectively held civic or national ideal.

In certain instances in *The American Monument*, Friedlander calls attention to the tendency of some commemorative forms, when mass reproduced and installed in public spaces across the country, to become visual clichés. Appearing eleven times in *The American Monument* are World War I Doughboy statues, nine of which derive from *The Spirit of the American Doughboy*, a mass-reproduced figurative statue that was originally sculpted by the E.M. Viquesney (American, 1876-1946). *The Spirit of the American Doughboy* depicts a uniformed soldier advancing through stumps and barbed wire. He raises his right arm, and in that hand holds a grenade. He carries a rifle in his left hand. The Viquesney statue was enormously popular, cast over one hundred times between 1920-1940 and placed in thirty-eight states. U.S. cities spent between \$2000 to \$5000 for one of the seven-foot bronze statues. Viquesney also

²⁹⁰ Snowshoe Thomsen was the moniker for the Norwegian-American John Albert Thomsen (1827-1876) who was known for delivering mail for long distances on skis and was considered to be the father of skiing in California. Wireless Operators Lost at Sea refers to radio operators who lost their lives on April 15, 1912, when the Titanic sank. Mary Dyer (ca. 1611-1660) was a Puritan turned Quaker, and one of the Boston Martyrs: Quaker condemned to hanging for their religious beliefs.

manufactured and marketed smaller statuettes, sold at \$6 each, as well as twelve-inch statuettes and lamps,²⁹¹ the latter advertised with the promise that these figures would last “Forever! Your buddy for life—a companionable, friendly lamp that you’ll treasure more every year.”²⁹²

Friedlander’s photographs of the Doughboy statues raise the question of whether repetition through mass-reproduction increases or decreases the monuments’ patriotic symbolism. This statue was once hailed by the World War Memorial Association as a “100% Perfect” rendering of the World War [I] soldier, meant to provide a “constant source of inspiration and study to younger students of history.”²⁹³ In Friedlander’s images, it is shown in less-than-inspirational circumstances by the early 1970s. Situated amidst lawn sprinklers, shrubbery, and as a tiny background object featured behind what appears to be a large pyramidal Christmas tree decoration, *The Spirit of the American Doughboy*, as a physical form and as a patriotic metaphor, seems virtually lost in the contemporary landscape.

One of Friedlander’s best-known photographs of the Viquesney statue, located in Bennington, Vermont, employs humor to underscore the manner in which this statue type has lost its stature, while imparting certain poignancy to the subject [fig. 4.8]. In this image, Friedlander pictures the statue in a snowfall, such that the grenade in the soldier’s upraised right arm, coated with a white powder, appears like a snowball, poised for launch. The figure itself is seen in the image’s middle ground, far enough removed in distance that the viewer can easily digest this visual pun. If the statue were seen at a closer proximity, such associations might be more difficult to make. If it were too small, the details of the statue would also be too far

²⁹¹ Doss, 24.

²⁹² For more information about both Viquesney and the popularity of *The Spirit of the American Doughboy*, including advertisements for both the full sized statue and its miniaturization as a table lamp, see <http://emvarchive.weebly.com/index.html>.

²⁹³ Refer to the online archive resource for E. M. Visquesney (<http://emvarchive.weebly.com/>) for scanned copies of original brochures and advertisements for the sculptor’s famous statue, in the form of maquettes and lamps.

removed to discern. Adding to the humor of this image is the fact that Friedlander again deliberately disregards one of the basic tenets of “good” picture taking: never position a subject such that an element in the background—in this case, a tree—is seen extending from the top of the figure’s head. Indeed, in this picture, the bare branches of the tree appear to sprout directly from the helmet of the Doughboy. These humorous visual elements transform the statue’s original symbolic meanings—its metaphors of masculinity and military might as fundamental characteristics of an American World War I soldier—into a gentle disdain for those same associations. These sentiments were certainly part and parcel of American response to the war in Vietnam, when returning veterans from a failed war were not treated in the same manner as World War II veterans, who by and large received a hero’s welcome. Rather, many were met with, at worst, disrespect and disdain, and at best, a lukewarm homecoming. Given Friedlander’s brilliance at crafting formal ambiguities, and the measured (versus caustic) irony the photograph conveys, interpretation of the image is left to the viewer. On the one hand, Friedlander’s transformation of the monument in its snowy setting into a playful scenario lightens the gravitas of the more serious patriotic heroism that the statue was originally meant to convey. On the other hand, the image calls attention to the loss of that seriousness and sincerity, and devotion to any collective ideal. In either case, it is the bankruptcy of the statue’s patriotic symbolism in the contemporary landscape that Friedlander emphasizes.

In another well-known image from *The American Monument*, which also features a Doughboy statue (though not the Viquesney figure), Friedlander again employs visual humor, this time to disrupt the viewer’s conditioned response to read photographs of monuments as mere documentations of a commemorative subject. In this photograph, the figurative statue sits atop a small cylindrical pedestal amidst in a small clump of shrubs [fig. 4.9]. The rifle-toting soldier,

stooped forward, appears to be taking a stealthy stride towards two women: one walking singly, the other pushing a child in a baby carriage. The child, whose head is turned behind her, appears to be looking back at the statue. On one level, this is a typical ironic juxtaposition on the part of Friedlander, though it goes deeper than simply being a visual pun or “decisive moment,” wherein the photographer waited for a particular moment when visual elements aligned. Within the picture frame, this scene suggests (as Martha Rosler astutely described it) that this “humanly created space has gotten away from its creators.”²⁹⁴ Friedlander effects a suspension of disbelief, such that the viewer no longer sees the image as simply a record of the commonplace, but starts to create a narrative around the elements. The photograph thus becomes more of a philosophical query (though not to Friedlander’s conscious mind) into the way we are conditioned to read photographs of monuments as having to serve some documentarian or commemorative function of their own. Friedlander disrupts that assumption, proving it unstable, and in so doing, dislocates the viewer from certainty of meaning.

Another example of mass reproduced commemorative forms were Boy Scout Statues of Liberty, which Friedlander photographed in Madison, Indiana, and Wichita, Kansas [figs. 4.10 and 4.11]. In these photographs, Friedlander again emphasizes the symbolic shift in significance and relevance that has occurred between the time the statues were originally erected and the time Friedlander photographed them in the late 1960s-early 1970s. The Boy Scout Statues of Liberty were 8 ½-foot-high stamped-copper replicas of the larger and better known statue located in New York Harbor. These statues were purchased by the Boy Scouts of America and distributed to hundreds of communities in the continental United States and its territories as part of a four-year crusade, begun in 1949, to “Strengthen the Arm of Liberty.” They were thus part and parcel of a national campaign to promote patriotism in the immediate aftermath of World War II, and to

²⁹⁴ Rosler, 48.

align devotion to country with the wholesome, traditional nuclear family values espoused by the Boy Scouts of America. According to the July 1950 issue of *The Scout Executive*, these replica statues, as “symbols of American freedom and American opportunity,” were also meant to connote the “vigor and vitality” of the Boy Scouts themselves, and were aimed at strengthening American patriotism (at its height in the immediate post-World War II years) by “constantly reminding” communities throughout the country of the importance of their devotion to national ideals.²⁹⁵

In Friedlander’s photographs, these statues appear to have lost their efficacy, having become divorced from their original purpose. Friedlander achieves this effect by showing, through juxtaposition with other architectural elements in the images, the diminutive stature and neglect of the statues. In the Indiana photograph [fig. 4.10], “lady Liberty” is shown as smaller in comparison to the building behind it, which takes up the entire top portion of the frame. This juxtaposition visually intensifies the difference in scale between the two structures. Additionally, there are no people in either of the images. The Wichita photograph [fig. 4.11] emphasizes the statue’s neglect, appearing as it does along a sidewalk through which grass and weeds grow. As in his images of the Viquesney Doughboy figures, Friedlander’s Boy Scout Statues of Liberty photographs depict monuments that have been drained of their patriotic import, and thus the original intentions for their construction, dissemination, and placement are seen to be no longer viable or relevant in the current social landscape.

Where Friedlander highlights the fact of mass reproduction and repetition in his photographs of statues like *The Spirit of the American Doughboy* and the Boy Scout Statues of Liberty, he calls attention to the singularity a monument in Watertown, New York

²⁹⁵ Leslie A. Stratton, “The Statue of Liberty,” *The Scout Executive* 15:7 (July 1950), 1-2. Reproduced online: <http://www.cheyennetroop101.org/liberty/>. The project was initiated by Kansas City native Jack Whitacker, and the first replica was erected in Kansas City.

commemorating veterans of the Vietnam War. This sculpture is notable as being the only memorial addressing that conflict in the book [fig. 4.12]. The reason for this dearth is practical: in 1976, there were very few memorials dedicated to Vietnam veterans, a paucity that was due in large part to the fact that the war did not officially end until the fall of Saigon on April 30, 1975. Additionally, the lack of memorials dedicated to the Vietnam War related to Americans' deeply conflicted feelings about the war's "honorability." In 1976, many Americans were more interested in forgetting the war than in trying to remember it. As historian James Mayo has noted, commemoration of the Vietnam War had three successive patterns of transition, which reflected the progressive stages of, first, trying to understand the meaning of a very controversial war and, then, determining how it needed to be memorialized. Mayo identifies these three stages as: a search for meaning, official national remembrance, and finally the formation of memorials.²⁹⁶ Getting to this third stage with respect to the Vietnam conflict, collectively, took several years. There were a few small, privately funded efforts which succeeded at building a memorial to Vietnam Veterans by the early 1970s: the Vietnam Veterans Peace and Brotherhood Chapel in New Mexico, is one example. But at the level of national recognition, it was not until 1980, through the efforts of Vietnam War veterans, that a major memorial was conceived. Upon securing an endorsement from the U. S. Congress in 1980 to build a memorial on two acres of land in the Washington, D.C. mall, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund established the purpose and intention for the memorial. Eventually the design of Chinese-American sculptor Maya Lin, then a Yale architecture student, was selected, and the finished memorial was dedicated on November 13, 1982.²⁹⁷

²⁹⁶ Mayo, 198.

²⁹⁷ Ibid., 203.

Friedlander deliberately pictured this one triangular monument to reference Vietnam directly, despite the fact that the structure itself was dedicated on November 11, 1969 “as a tribute to all wars” and erected “In Honor of Those Who Served.”²⁹⁸ In reality, the pyramid has inscriptions on its other sides, which reference several patriotic values and historic conflicts, such as “duty” and “Korea” [fig. 4.13]. In Friedlander’s image, the only facet of the spare, triangular monument visible to the viewer is the side that shows two words carved into its surface: “Honor” and “Vietnam.” Friedlander was thus drawn specifically to the side of the monument that referenced the Vietnam War, if not at the time of exposure, then certainly in the process of the book’s layout and editing. In *The American Monument*, this image is placed as one of three pictures of war memorials on a single page, along with a large crucifix commemorating “Our Dead,” in Lexington, Kentucky, and the East Coast War Memorial, which is fashioned in the shape of a large eagle and is located in Battery Park, New York. In this layout, if not in reality, Friedlander’s picture of the Watertown monument appears to situate the Vietnam War as part of an historical trajectory honoring war veterans, even if, in reality, many Americans at the time were deeply conflicted about the war and how those men should be commemorated.

Part IV: *The American Monument* and the Commemorative Survey

The commemorative function of *The American Monument* project might also be seen within the context of the photographic survey, a methodological approach that had a resurgence of interest during the early to mid-1970s. There were several exhibitions and publications in the late 1960s and early 1970s that related to the subject of the nineteenth-century photographic survey. In 1973, curator Diana Edkins organized an exhibition titled *Landscape & Discovery*, an

²⁹⁸ The monument was funded by the Veterans Memorial Association, the National Defense Committee of the Greater Watertown Chamber of Commerce and other veterans groups, and placed in close proximity to the Founder’s Boulder in Watertown’s public square known today as “Peanut Park.” Dave Shampine, “A Monumental Undertaking: Watertown’s Public Square Comes Full Circle as Restoration Project Ends,” *Watertown Daily Times*, November 16, 2008.

historical overview that began with the work of Carleton Watkins and included both nineteenth- and twentieth-century landscape photographers. An enthusiastic review of the exhibition by Gene Thornton in the *New York Times* emphasized the relevance of the nineteenth-century figures for contemporary practice. Thornton noted that the “bare and documentary style” of the earlier photographers served as an inspiration for contemporary photographers who assumed the documentary style as a deliberate aesthetic strategy.²⁹⁹

The idea of the photographic survey received renewed attention in 1975, when Weston Naef, then Assistant Curator in the Department of Prints and Drawings at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and James N. Wood, Associate Director of the Albright-Knox Art Gallery in Buffalo, New York, co-organized a major exhibition titled *Era of Exploration: The Rise of Landscape Photography in the American West, 1860-1885*. This show of 185 photographs, with an accompanying 260-page catalogue, focused specifically on the “pioneer” photographer-explorers who worked on the government surveys and as part of the railroad construction documentary projects. It garnered a significant degree of enthusiastic press coverage, much of which emphasized the reasons for the appeal of this work in the 1970s. Hilton Kramer commended the exhibition as ground-breaking and eye-opening for modern viewers, as it “yields up new heroes and new scenarios to meet the needs and aspirations of a new cultural situation.”³⁰⁰ Kramer emphasized the cross-historical connections between this nineteenth-century work and then-current cultural interests “in photography, in the American wilderness and in the history of American visual art in the nineteenth century.”³⁰¹ Other reviewers commented

²⁹⁹ Gene Thornton, “Is There Really Nothing Else Left to Explore?,” *New York Times*, February 18, 1973.

³⁰⁰ Hilton Kramer, “Photos Give New Life to the Old West,” *New York Times*, April 15, 1975.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 30.

on the aesthetic of “detached observation” that characterized the nineteenth-century landscapes,³⁰² or described it as “photography caught in the nakedest possible attempt to achieve an elevated style.”³⁰³ Gene Thornton, who penned the latter comments, mused on the way this stripped-down aesthetic suggested the “democratic. . . insignificance” of these photographs as compared with contemporary paintings by Frederic Church, Alfred Bierstadt, and Thomas Moran. However, he viewed their austerity as being extremely appealing in the 1970s, “an age of television” in which people are “bombarded day and night with pictures of a triviality and ephemerality beyond Toqueville’s wildest imaginings.”³⁰⁴

These reviews highlight the recognition by critics of the relevance of nineteenth-century documentary aesthetics for contemporary artistic practice. For photographers, critics, curators, and audiences living in the media-saturated, commodified, and commercialized social landscape of the late 1960s and early 1970s, an aesthetic approach, devoid of heightened emotion or propagandistic intent, had definite appeal. Curators and photographers looked to the photographic precedent of nineteenth-century survey photographers like Timothy O’Sullivan as a conceptual model for their own artistic and cultural concerns. One of the most important exhibitions to do this (more so in hindsight, perhaps) was *New Topographics: Photographs of a Man-Altered Landscape* (1975), curated by William Jenkins and Joe Deal. Jenkins and Deal

³⁰² John Russell, “Art: ‘Era of Exploration,’ Photos of West, at Met,” *New York Times*, May 24, 1975.

³⁰³ Gene Thornton, “The Idealized Grandeur of Nature,” *New York Times*, June 29, 1975.

³⁰⁴ Ibid., 110. In general, Thornton was no great fan of Friedlander, whose work he found puzzling, and whom he only begrudgingly accepted over time as being instrumental in inspiring a new generation of “artless” art photographers. See Gene Thornton, “All of Sudden Friedlander Seems Passé,” *New York Times*, December 15, 1974 or his summary of Friedlander’s significance (and predicted obsolescence). Thornton’s earlier reviews of Friedlander’s work are mixed in their embrace/critique of Friedlander’s “artless” style: see “Sure Way to Ruin A Party,” a review of his “Gatherings” series at MoMA (*New York Times*, February 20, 1972); or “America: The Beautiful?” in which he discusses Friedlander’s book, *Self-Portrait* (*New York Times*, August 23, 1970). Thornton had far less enthusiasm for photographers such as Marc Cohen, Henry Wessel, Jr., Robert Adams and Emmet Gowin, whose “banality” of style and choice of “insignificant” subject matter were, to his mind, completely devoid of human interest. See “Formalists who Flirt with Banality,” *New York Times*, November 14, 1976 as well as “Is There Nothing Else Left to Explore?,” *New York Times*, February 18, 1973.

deliberately chose the term “topographics” to reference the idea of a geographic survey and the “stylelessness” of the nineteenth-century Western landscape photographers. The show featured the work of ten photographers who looked back to that earlier work as inspiration for their own kind of “stylelessness,” which Jenkins described as “an effort to subdue the intrusion of style” as a stylistic decision in of itself.³⁰⁵

Two significant projects began in 1976 that were conceived specifically as (or for) photographic surveys, suggesting the extent to which this model appealed to contemporary concerns. The first, a federally-funded endeavor, was the inception of the National Endowment for the Arts Photography Survey grant, a new category of funding that, until its demise in 1981, would support over seventy wide-ranging survey projects. These included the Re-Photographic Survey, a project which involved numerous photographers who went back to the exact Western locations that O’Sullivan, Jackson, and others had stood to make contemporary views of the same landscapes.³⁰⁶ The second, funded by the Joseph E. Seagram & Son, Inc., was the American Court House project, a Bicentennial endeavor costing \$250,000 that involved hiring twenty-three photographers to make over 6,000 photographs across the United States to document the American county court house in forty-eight states.³⁰⁷ The idea to employ a group of creative photographers to make photographs for a greater common cause was in many ways nostalgically driven. It harkened back to the Farm Security Administration’s massive

³⁰⁵ William Jenkins, introduction to *New Topographics: Photographs of a Man-altered Landscape* (Rochester, NY: International Museum of Photography at George Eastman House, 1975), 6. As Britt Salvesen has recently argued in her scholarly re-evaluation of the *New Topographics* exhibition, Jenkins’s efforts at clarifying the use of the term topography were ultimately indeterminate, and the photographers themselves had mixed reactions to being categorized as “topographers.” Nonetheless, the prevalence of that term—as that of adjective “man-altered” in the subtitle—was of its time, and part of a larger cultural dialogue.

³⁰⁶ This project was directed by Mark Klett, Joann Verburg and Ellen Manchester.

³⁰⁷ This is the amount quoted by Carter B. Horsley, in his article “On Trial: The Courthouse,” *New York Times*, July 25, 1976. These statistics are according to Gene Thornton’s article about an exhibition of a selection of the photographs, titled “A Strong Sense of Grass-Roots America,” *New York Times*, July 18, 1976.

documentary projects of the 1930s, which was considered by many curators and photographers as a golden era of federally funded, social documentation. The photographic survey mindset also reflected the growing interest in and institutionalization of photography during the 1970s, a level of activity described by photographer Lewis Baltz as “unequaled since the 1930s.”³⁰⁸

The Seagram’s *Court House* project is particularly interesting to consider with respect to Friedlander’s *The American Monument*, in that the subjects of both endeavors are recognized as sculptural (or architectural) symbols of founding American values such as justice, freedom, and democracy. Court houses, like monuments, are landmarks whose social significance and utility have changed over time, particularly those structures located in urban environments. In some instances, the symbolic value of these forms came into conflict with urban planning initiatives. As one *New York Times* article reported on the fate of the Old Westchester County Court house complex, “classic” urban landmark disputes often pit preservationists against those supporting urban renewal. The former group argued to put such buildings on the National Register of Historic Places, while the latter believed the court houses stood in the way of revamping a decaying urban core, and thus needed to be demolished or thoroughly modernized.³⁰⁹ Both Friedlander’s *The American Monument* and the Seagram’s *Court House* project appeared at a moment when these larger cultural debates unfolded.

There are other similarities between *Court House* and *The American Monument*. Richard Pare’s essay for the *Court House* publication is similar in tone to Katz’s adulatory text for *The American Monument*. Where Pare emphasized the historic significance of the county court house

³⁰⁸ As quoted in Mark Rice, *Through the Lens of the City: NEA Photography Surveys of the 1970s* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2005), xii.

³⁰⁹ The article quotes Richard Pare, who worked with the project’s chief director Phyllis Lambert in the editing and writing of the accompanying publication, as saying that even if the older courthouses were spared from demolition, they would be “threatened with a loss of dignity by modernization.” Horsley, 173.

as “an integral part of the life of every settlement as it evolved into a county,”³¹⁰ Katz emphasized the American monument’s capacity for both embodying “the idea of excellence worthy of permanence” and the monument’s persistence in spite of its changing surroundings. As Katz wrote: “In their persistence they outlast and overcome dedication ceremonies, immediate neglect, patriotic anniversary wreaths, sentimentality, jeers, epithets, graffiti and vandalism of the establishment and the homage of street gangs.”³¹¹ Both Pare and Katz articulated the social and symbolic importance of their respective subjects, and the dangers of their obsolescence over time.³¹²

There were also, however, obvious differences between these two projects. *Court House*, for example, was far more preconceived and systematic in its intent than Friedlander’s endeavor, which as previously mentioned coalesced after the photographs were actually taken. The aim of *Court House* was to document a significant cross-section of courthouses in the country’s 3,043 counties and indicate “the breadth and chronology as well as the spread of architectural ideas” in order to create a definitive archive.³¹³ *Court House* also engaged twenty-four photographers over the course of three years (beginning in September 1974) in various parts of the country, giving each photographer creative freedom within the project’s limits. In the course of editing the photographs, Pare concluded that there were essentially two categories that emerged: straightforward photographs that “do not transcend the normal expectations for images of this kind,” and those that offered “higher levels of interpretation” that, in Pare’s assessment, balanced

³¹⁰ Richard Pare, ed., *Court House A Photographic Document* (New York: Horizon Press, 1978), 7.

³¹¹ Katz, *The American Monument*, unpaginated.

³¹² Pare notes that these buildings once served as sites for public mustering places during the War of Independence and the Civil War, and as places where the outcomes of battles and news of human casualties were announced. After World War I, as the Federal government became a more centralizing power, and as town and city planning placed an increased emphasis on business and manufacturing often sited at the town or city’s periphery, the older court houses became obsolete, and lost their social function as a “linch-pin around which the town developed.” See Pare, 8.

³¹³ Ibid., 8. This archive would include both negatives and prints, as well as supplemental research material.

well with the more “traditional” views to give a fuller view of the subjects. Collectively, the *Court House* photographs show exteriors and interiors, architectural details as well as full buildings, jail interiors and views looking out from the courthouse steps. In a few instances, people who work at the court houses—judges, janitors, and sheriffs, for example—are included. In Friedlander’s book, there are no truly identifiable categories, and the arrangement of images is more reliant on juxtaposing visual affinities than historic relationships or monumental types.

Comparisons between select photographs from *Court House* and Friedlander’s series highlight such differences. Consider, for example, two photographs by William Clift from the *Court House* book: a view of the Knox County Court House in Vincennes, Indiana, and a view of the King William County Court House in King William, Virginia [figs. 4.14 and 4.15]. Both photographs depict monuments situated just outside the courthouse buildings. The architecture and the monuments are shown near the center of the compositions, without any competing visual interference from other elements in the scene. The photographs serve a descriptive function, allowing the viewer to ascertain certain architectural forms and styles. The images are also taken from a relatively close proximity to the subjects, and from a vantage point that looks up to the monuments. This angle of view confers a sense of reverence and dignity to the structures, while also imparting a human scale to the buildings.

Compare the Clift photographs to Friedlander’s views of Federal court houses or of statues situated near state capitol buildings [figs. 4.16, 4.17]. The Federal court houses, which are among the most straightforward views in Friedlander’s book, are photographed from a distance such that the details of the monuments, statuary, and sculptural reliefs associated with the architecture are difficult to discern. The massive architecture, which visually dwarfs the monuments, seems both impersonal and imposing, particularly in Friedlander’s view of the San

Angelo, Texas court house grounds. This disjuncture is especially apparent when compared with the more intimate views of the county court houses. Friedlander's image of a statue of Lt. Frank Luke, Jr., situated amidst a hodge-podge assortment of cacti and other desert plants in what appears to be a traffic median, gives the statue of the World War I fighter ace no visual dominance amidst the sparse landscaping. The figure becomes, in effect, just another part of the scenery, which is itself not particularly alluring.

Similar differences between Friedlander's photographs and those taken as part of the Seagram's survey are apparent when comparing another view from *Court House*, Tod Papageorge's image of the Boulder County Court House [fig. 4.18], with the photographs from Friedlander's Doughboy series in *The American Monument*. Papageorge's image depicts a vertical stone marker decorated with a linear drawing of a World War I soldier. The monument itself sits on a neatly manicured lawn, geometrically aligned with building and sidewalk. Papageorge was close enough to the monument to record the inscription: "In Honor of World War Veterans of Boulder County." The images in Friedlander's Doughboy sequence, as suggested earlier, offer far less of a detailed visual description of these monuments. Taken at a significant distance from the monuments, such that it is impossible to read any inscriptions or determine specific features, Friedlander's photographs emphasize obstruction over clarity, making compositional choices such that the Doughboy statues compete for attention and/or become an integral component of the photographer's witty visual puns.

The NEA Photography Surveys were similar to *Court House* in their goal to create a vast archive of images that surveyed American subjects at a particular historical moment. These surveys occurred during the six-year existence of this granting agency, and took place in various U.S. regions, states, and ethnic communities. Like the Seagram's project, the NEA surveys

employed dozens of photographer, including lesser-known or then-emerging photographers such as Martin Stupitch, Wendy Ewald, Terry Evans, and Linda Rich, as well as more established figures, such as Joel Meyerowitz, Robert Adams, Joe Deal, Minor White, and Friedlander himself (the grant funded his *Factory Valleys* project). As Mark Rice summarizes in his study of the NEA photographic surveys, the projects were wide-ranging in terms of both intention (social documentary, artistic, appropriative) and scope.³¹⁴ Surveys of cities were especially prevalent, perhaps due to the complex social realities facing urban environments in a time of great economic and political flux and changing ideals of urban planning and renewal. The result of the NEA surveys was an extremely diverse archive that offered multiple perspectives and photographic styles. This lack of coherence was seen as a detriment.

The NEA Photography Surveys garnered a great deal of criticism for being too artistically conceived overall. As Rice again notes, many contentions arose between those who felt the artistic merit of the photographs overwhelmed their capacity to function as documents of social realities. Andy Grundberg wrote, while the NEA surveys were “earnest and well-intended...to give creative photographers a social function...usually their products were more artistic than social.”³¹⁵ Friedlander’s *Factory Valleys* project—a commission through the Akron Art Museum—served as a case in point. As Rice indicates, the Final Descriptive Report of Friedlander’s project concluded that “didactic observation is not a paramount concern of Friedlander...what is, is the making of great photographs; the creating of images that are, above all, self-contained works of art.”³¹⁶

³¹⁴ Rice, introduction to *Through the Lens of the City*, xi–xxi.

³¹⁵ Andy Grundberg, “Displaced Sympathies: A Reading of Bill Burke’s Portraits,” originally printed in *Bill Burke: Portraits* (Ecco Press, 1987); reprinted in *Crisis of the Real* (New York: Aperture, 1999), 212.

³¹⁶ Rice, 70.

The problem with such narrow, modernist rhetoric is that it shuts out the possibility that “great photographs” have to be “above all” one thing or another, and that when they are defined as “self-contained” art, they cannot be considered as anything else. Such critical tensions—between a modernist, artistic interpretation of photography and a postmodern, Marxist-inflected critique—would escalate with the ascendance of postmodern criticism in the 1980s and 1990s. The cessation of the NEA Photography Surveys grant in 1981 was in part a result of these growing tensions amongst photographers and critics, but it was also due to the larger conservative political agenda of Ronald Reagan, who assumed the U. S. presidency in that same year.³¹⁷

To categorize Friedlander’s *The American Monument* as a comprehensive, well-organized survey of its subject, like the *Court House* project, would ultimately be misleading. Friedlander’s book also lacked the preconception of the NEA surveys. Though it includes a wide array of monument types throughout the U. S., the selection and arrangement of the images within *The American Monument* is more idiosyncratic than systematic. The images are not organized geographically, topically, or chronologically. In fact, there are no specific dates included in the publication. In some instances the geographic location of the monument is unknown. Titles such as “Justice: Location Unknown” or “To All Liberty Loving People. Location Unknown” suggest an ironic commentary on Friedlander’s part that certain values are no longer viable to many Americans. Despite these differences, as I have tried to suggest here, there are elements of the survey mentality evident in the selection and design for *The American Monument*. Perhaps more significantly, the same nostalgic impulse that inspired the photographic survey’s resurgence in the 1970s could be seen as contributing to *The American Monument*’s impetus as well.

³¹⁷ Ibid., 205.

Conclusion

Friedlander's sophisticated and nuanced take on the subject of the American monument as a commemorative form in the late 1960s until the early 1970s was neither wholly elegiac nor entirely ironic. The formal complexities and ambiguities in these images, which have become trademark aesthetic strategies for the photographer, resonated with the broader cultural sentiments of disorientation, dislocation, and ambivalence that permeated America during these years. As the country celebrated its 200th anniversary with mixed emotions and conflicted feelings that arose in the wake of Watergate and America's defeat in Vietnam, Americans were taking measure of the disjuncture they felt between the ideals implied by America's founding principles—liberty, equality, justice—and the realities of lived experience. Additionally, the American dream of living a comfortable material existence if one worked hard and played by the rules that was eminently viable following World War II, seemed far less assured in the midst of the deep economic recession of the early 1970s. The mood of America was far from buoyant as people looked back at their past. However, it was also far from hopeless, as citizens assessed the present, and considered which enduring American values were worth celebrating. Friedlander's photographs of overlooked, neglected, or visibly negligible monuments as they are situated within the social landscape raise all of these questions. *The American Monument* prompts considerations of the relationship between collective memory and national identity in the early 1970s as reified in American monuments. As such, the publication commemorates that particular moment in history in the form of a finely crafted, wholly unique, photography book; one that speaks to a chapter in America's history when history itself was in the throes of reevaluation.

Conclusion

The efforts of John Szarkowski to articulate a formal “photographic” discourse for the medium of photography arose at a time during the mid-1960s and early 1970s when the art world was beginning to challenge modernist ideas of originality, authorship, the subjectivity of historical narratives, and the relevance of medium specificity for interpretation. Szarkowski’s formalist agenda and his disregard for appropriated uses of the medium that overtly advocated social agendas was in many ways aligned with MoMA’s larger institutional press for an art that was modern and formalist.³¹⁸ By privileging documentary-style photography divorced from socio-political context during one of the nation’s most tumultuous revolutionary periods, Szarkowski ultimately failed in his attempt to wrestle photographic practice into a neatly articulated theory. As postmodern critics effectively dismantled Szarkowski’s rhetoric through their own pointed political agendas, particularly during the mid-1970s through the 1990s, they succeeded, through their own eventual position of dominance in the academic and critical field, in driving underground critical reinterpretations of and scholarly engagement with works by the

³¹⁸ The Museum of Modern Art, as guardian of modernist insularity, came under attack as an institution for its refusal to take a political stance against the Vietnam War, or at the very least, to support those artists who did. As Chris Balaschak has noted in a recent, insightful essay that reinterprets Garry Winogrand’s photo book *The Animals* within the context of the Vietnam War, during the latter part of the 1960s, artists who were actively engaged in the social and political uprisings of the period also began to appropriate documentary photography from sources such as *Life* magazine to create artworks aimed at political protest, precisely because those photographic sources were deemed the antithesis of the more rarified and self-contained forms of modern art. Balaschak specifically discusses the use of army photographer Ron Haeberle’s horrific image of the My Lai massacre that had been published in *Life* magazine in December 1969 by the Art Worker’s Coalition as a lithographic poster the following year, with the textual overlay “Q: And Babies? And Babies.” The function of Haeberle’s image as a documentary photograph, as Balaschak underscores, was deemed by this group of artists to be distinct from the isolated, rarified realm of modern art and thus particularly well suited to their political purposes: it was not considered art. See Chris Balaschak, “Planet of the Apes: My Lai, John Szarkowski, and *The Animals*,” *Art Journal* 71:3 (Fall 2012), 6-25.

photographers Szarkowski supported. As historian Douglas Nickel noted, such ideological imperatives effectively “threw the baby out with the bathwater.”³¹⁹

In our own historical moment, artists, academics, and curators recognize the cultural and formal complexities of both “straight” or documentary-style photography and more conceptual uses of the medium. However, the tendency to position “serious” art photography into discrete categories of practice remains strong. The photographer Paul Graham (born 1956), in a 2010 presentation at the Museum of Modern Art titled “The Unreasonable Apple,” described his frustration with this tendency. Frustrated by a review of work by Jeff Wall that described the artist’s practice as a more complex, sophisticated approach than that of a photographer, like Winogrand, who made pictures by “just snapping his world,” Graham stated:

The problem is that while you can discuss what Jeff Wall did in an elaborately staged street tableaux [sic], how do you explain what Garry Winogrand did on a real New York street when he ‘just’ took the picture? How do we articulate this uniquely photographic creative act, and express what it amounts to in terms such that the art world, highly attuned to synthetic creation—the making of something by the artist—can appreciate serious photography that engages with the world as it is?³²⁰

Though Graham’s sympathies clearly lie with a medium-specific definition of photography (implied when he speaks of “this uniquely photographic creative act”), the photographer is also quick to note that he does not advocate “an either/or situation” wherein one must choose between “straight” photography and the kind of fabricated-to-be-photographed works created by Jeff Wall, Cindy Sherman, and Thomas Demand. Graham’s qualification is itself telling, however, for it implies he felt compelled to clarify that he was not advocating a conservative return to

³¹⁹ Douglas R. Nickel, “History of Photography: The State of Research,” *Art Bulletin* 83:3 (September 2001), 545.

³²⁰ The transcript of Graham’s talk is published online at: http://www.paulgrahamarchive.com/writings_by.html. Viewed July 29, 2013.

what he called “photographic fundamentalism,” as epitomized by the formalism of John Szarkowski.³²¹ Rather, Graham’s concern was ultimately that “straight” photography (which here can be seen to encompass documentary-style photography) had fallen so far from view in the contemporary art world that curators, artists, and critics had lost a capacity to speak about its socio-cultural, formal and philosophical complexities. As Graham concluded: “The position of ‘straight’ photography in the art world reminds me of the parable of an isolated community who grew up eating potatoes all their life, and when presented with an apple, thought it unreasonable and useless, because it didn’t taste like a potato.”³²² In Graham’s estimation, the current contemporary art world, having established a taste for large-scale staged tableaux and appropriated uses of photography, had proven itself incapable of adjusting its palate to consider the possibility that someone like Winogrand, who worked as a street photographer and used a “straight” approach to the medium, might have something equally complex and engaging to contribute to the broader dialogue about contemporary photography.³²³

In the years since 2000, as the critical lenses through which scholars, critics, artists and curators interpret and appreciate photography have changed focus, the style and rhetoric of photographic practices most readily embraced by elite galleries, museums, collectors, and

³²¹ Ibid.

³²² Ibid.

³²³ An example of the kind of critical writing about contemporary art photography that ignores the relevance of photographic practice pre-dating the work of figures like Jeff Wall, Thomas Demand, Thomas Struth and Andreas Gursky, among others, is Michael Fried’s book *Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008). In this book, as suggested by its title, Fried argues that photography only began to grapple with issues of the relationship between the object and the viewer in earnest during the 1970s, when photographers began to produce images on a large scale that could compete with painting, which until then had been the medium most suited to such a dialogue. In *Why Photography Matters*, Fried ignores any historical precedents in the history of photography wherein photography was, in fact, addressing the effects of scale in relation to the viewer’s response, and photographers were producing works that made manifest, in the image itself, the position of the viewer as an integral component of the artistic experience. Such debates go well beyond the scope of this dissertation, but they are worth mentioning here to lend credence to Graham’s assertions regarding the tendency for certain contemporary art critics to dismiss the kind of “straight,” small-scale street photographs Winogrand made as having relevance beyond what Fried identifies as the “photography ghetto.”

academic institutions have commensurately shifted. Graham's simple acknowledgment that one's preference for a particular artistic use of and rhetoric about photography need not imply a complete rejection of differing modes of photographic production and critique is a refreshing assertion. As he suggests, scholarly dialogue about photography does not have to exist as a bifurcated discourse—the "either/or situation" he noted— though certainly such dichotomies have informed the many histories that have been, and no doubt will continue to be, written about a medium whose multiple technologies, uses, practitioners, and critics render it impossible to wrestle into any singular conception of art photography.

The essays that constitute this dissertation, focusing as they do on bodies of work by Friedlander, Winogrand, and Adams, are thus framed by a methodological effort to bring renewed critical attention to the complex relationship between a historicized understanding of these photographers' formal adherence to documentary-style aesthetics and the socio-cultural complexities inherent in their subject matter—the American social landscape of 1963-1976. By extending scholarship to consider the formal achievements of these bodies of work within the constellation of competing sociopolitical ideals, values, and agendas that informed and defined their subjects, this dissertation brings renewed attention to the power and enduring relevance of these photographs to our own historical moment.

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